THE NATURE AND MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE

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PREFACE

THIS little book is intended as an introduction to the study of the Bible on modern lines. It has been written to meet the needs of those students in universities and training colleges who have no special theological equipment, but who wish to be able to read their Bibles intelligently. Students as a class are especially liable to the perplexity caused by the conflict between traditional views of Scripture and modern historical criticism. For this perplexity the only remedy is knowledge. Hence this attempt to give a summary of the conclusions now generally accepted regarding the origin, date, authorship, etc., of the Biblical writings, to set them in their historical relations, to describe their contents and teaching, and to estimate their permanent and positive value for the religious life of man—always with an eye to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the student world. It is hoped that the book may serve at least as an introduction to a wider and deeper study of the subject. For that reason it has been

kept, as far as possible, free from technicalities, and is not over-encumbered with references. Those who wish to pursue the study further will do well to consult Professor Peake's "The Bible — Its Origin, Significance, and Abiding Worth," or "The Bible of To-day," by the Rev. A. Blakiston. I am indebted to the Rev. Leslie Hunter for his kindness in reading the proofs and for some valuable suggestions.

W. B. SELBIE.

OXFORD,
May, 1916.

BLESSED LORD, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of Thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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NOTE.

Throughout this book the distinctive name of the God of Israel is written Yahweh. This is the correct rendering of the Hebrew word wrongly vocalised Jehovah.

For fuller information on the Jewish Calendar and Feasts, the books of the Apocrypha, readers are referred to Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible or Dummelow's One Volume Commentary.

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CHAPTER I

THE BIBLE AND THE MODERN WORLD

THE historian J. R. Green begins his description of Puritan England with the following well-known words: "No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England during the years which parted the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the meeting of the Long Parliament. England became the people of a book, and that book was the Bible. It was as yet the one English book which was familiar to every Englishman; it was read at churches and read at home, and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom had not deadened, kindled a startling enthusiasm."[1] This was the beginning

[1] "Short History of the English People," Vol. II., p. 933.

of a long story. Among the literary, moral, and religious influences which have moulded the life and thought of the English-speaking peoples the Bible has held a very high place. The stately prose of the Authorised Version has been a " well of English undefiled " from which our greatest writers have not disdained to draw. Its poetry has kindled the imaginations of men, its prophecies have stirred their zeal for goodness and for God. It has been to them at once a manual of devotion and a fountain of inspiration. They have found in it strength for their daily lives, the patience by which they have endured hardness, and in the hour and article of death an everlasting hope. No doubt this has been partly due to the fact that the Bible has been regarded as a veritable Word of God. Its teaching has been held to be inspired, and all its statements have been accepted as literally and verbally correct. Hence it has been for many the one and only authority in religious things. The average Christian has been quite uncritical in his acceptance of the claims made on its behalf, and, when difficulties have arisen, has been content to shelter himself behind its words. The time is not so far away when " The Bible says so " would have been sufficient in certain circles to silence any doubt or questioning that might arise.

Now, however, this is no longer the case. We in these days know so much more about the Bible

than our fathers did that we can no longer look at it through their eyes, or judge it by their standards. To us it is not a book, but a library; and the volumes composing it are not uniform, or homogeneous, but very varied in character and very diverse in aim. They are not all of equal spiritual value, and in that sense are not all equally inspired. We cannot quote from them indiscriminately and be sure, as our fathers were, that we have in them the actual language of the Holy Spirit. We recognise the large human element that has helped in their composition, and we know that, in order to understand them aright, it is necessary to use all the means by which we should seek to elucidate any other ancient writings. Indeed, the greater the value we attach to the books of the Bible, the more eagerly and reverently shall we strive to understand them; leaving no stone unturned in the effort to discover their origin and history, and to make their meaning plain. Nor should we shrink from carrying out this process to its logical conclusions. It is better to let the Bible be its own witness and tell its own tale than to insist on fitting it in to some preconceived theories either of inspiration or revelation. For, after all, the Bible is greater than any commentary upon it, or any doctrine concerning it; and it is when we let it speak for itself and listen reverently, and with an open mind, that we come nearest to its soul and secret. Those who deal

with it in this spirit need have no fear if many old beliefs concerning it have to be abandoned and many traditional theories break down. So long as human nature is what it is, so long as sin and sorrow are realities, and the heart of man seeks restlessly for God, so long will His Word have its ancient power, and become articulate in the Bible for those that have ears to hear. That we should be able to use the Bible in this way without having to commit ourselves to theories concerning it that are now quite untenable, is pure gain. And it is always well to remember that it is in its power of moral and spiritual appeal, and not mainly in ideas concerning its infallibility or authority, that the real value and attractiveness of the Bible have lain. It is because the Bible "finds" men, speaks to their need, and kindles them to nobler living, that it becomes to them a Word of God.

But it is just here that the real difficulty of our subject lies. The problem of the Bible to-day is not merely the one raised by the new historical and literary criticism. It is part of the general problem raised by the widespread indifference to all religion. The trouble is that men and women do not read their Bibles. They have no felt want which the Scriptures may be supposed to supply. They are not hungering and thirsting after God, or goodness, or truth. They have no deep sense of sin, or longing for forgiveness. And the fact

remains that until the Bible is approached in some such spirit of need, it will fail of its purpose, and remain to all intents and purposes dumb. We must plead, therefore, at the outset for the right method in approaching the study of the Bible. As a great storehouse of religious experience, it requires the same kind of experience for its interpretation. The secret of it is one that is often hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes. Reverence, humility, and prayerfulness are aids to its understanding—quite as necessary as scholarship and technical equipment. But, given the right spirit and temper, then there is no doubt that the help that scholarship can afford is invaluable. It enables us to see things in their right proportions and perspective. It saves us from the confusions and contradictions of the old-fashioned type of exposition, and it gives to the Bible a place and function in the development of religious experience which enhances its value and adds new point and meaning to its message.

Biblical Criticism

The most familiar term used to describe the new methods of Biblical study is that much abused phrase "the Higher Criticism." It is short and convenient, but often misunderstood. Sometimes it is rather scornfully described as "the

so-called Higher Criticism," as though it arrogated to itself a superiority over all other kinds of criticism that was not justified by the facts. Needless to say, the term conveys no such implication. It is a method of Biblical study that needs to be kept distinct from textual, or lower, criticism. This latter deals simply with the text of Scripture, is concerned with corrections and emendations, discusses manuscripts and versions, and has as its object the attainment of the purest and most original text. The Higher Criticism, on the other hand, is the science which investigates the age, authorship, authenticity, and historical worth of the different books of the Bible. It is no new thing. There were higher critics among the most orthodox fathers of the Church; and both Luther and Calvin may be reckoned with them. What is new about the Higher Criticism of modern times is its possession of a sounder method, so that the whole process has become more scientific, and has attained to more definite results. If it has not yet solved all the problems presented by the study of the Bible, it has at least shown the way to the solution of most of them, and has provided many of the necessary data. For many years past a large number of devoted scholars have given up their whole lives to the elucidation of Biblical problems, and we ought thankfully to confess that they have been successful almost beyond expecta-

tion. We are able now to speak with a considerable measure of assurance regarding the age, authorship and composition of the books of the Old and New Testaments. If many traditional theories regarding them have been overthrown, it has all been in order to bring us nearer to the truth, and in the truth there is nothing to make us afraid. The process of readjustment is, no doubt, a painful one to many, but it has its reward, if it helps us to understand more clearly and to appreciate more fully the ways of God with man. It has the advantage also of avoiding most of the difficulties inherent in the older and more rigid views of the Bible and of Revelation.

The Historical Method

But we must now turn to a more detailed consideration of those new aids to Biblical study on which modern Higher Criticism depends. Here we have to do first with the adaptation to the Bible of what is known as the historical method of interpretation. This makes it impossible any longer to regard the books of the Bible as presenting to us a flat surface, so to speak, and as being all of equal historical or religious value. We learn to apply to them the laws of development, and to consider them in the light of their origin. As it becomes possible to date them, so we can study them in view of the circumstances that

gave them birth, and reach an interpretation that is at least based upon facts. We shall come to see later on how vitally this method alters our perspective, and how fresh and clear is the new light it throws on familiar facts and words. It is in this sense that it is true that we ought to study the Bible like any other book. Not that we must reduce the Bible to the level of ordinary literature, but that we should apply to it those rules and standards of exposition, the effectiveness of which has been proved in other and kindred departments. The truest reverence for the Scriptures will urge us to use all the most modern aids to their understanding, and, among these, careful historical research is by no means the least important. It helps us to discover what the Scriptures originally meant and said, and to estimate their value for the men who wrote them, and for those for whose instruction they were first written. It substitutes an exact exegesis for all merely allegorical or mystical interpretations, and it finds the best means of explaining the Bible in the Bible itself rather than in any theories concerning it. In this way the true value of the Bible is really enhanced. Men cease to demand from it what it never professes to give. They know that it cannot teach them geology, ethnology, and the like, and they come to estimate more highly that which it can teach, viz., religious experience and the Word and ways of God.

The Bible and the World

The Bible and Science

Further, we have to reckon with the very marked influence of modern scientific discoveries on the interpretation of the Bible. Geology has given us a conception of creation, and of the age of the earth, which is not compatible with the stories in the Book of Genesis. Biology and anthropology have brought to light facts regarding the origin of mankind which there is no disputing, and which show that the story of our first parents is poetry rather than science—an effort of the religious imagination that is not without parallel in the literature of other peoples than the Jews. In the same way modern physics and astronomy have shown that the whole conception of the Universe that was familiar to the Biblical writers was that of their time, and is not to be regarded as final or scientifically correct. The comparative study of religions has made it quite clear that there are traces of ideas and practices in the earlier stages of the religion of Israel that are characteristic of primitive religion generally. The net result of all this is that we are compelled to recognise in the Bible the existence of a human element. In it God spake unto our fathers in divers portions and in divers manners, but He spake through men. These men used the language of their time and country, and were not emancipated from the ordinary conditions of

human intercourse. The wonderful thing is that, even under these serious limitations, the message they gave obtained a certain universal significance. Strip it of that which belongs to the special time and circumstances of its delivery, and translate it into modern terms, and it will be found still to remain a word of God for men. This distinction between the form and the substance of Scripture, between the letter and the spirit, is essential to a true understanding of its message, and it is just this distinction which the new knowledge of the Bible helps us to maintain and to make clear. It must not be supposed, however, that the course of Biblical criticism has ever been a smooth or easy one. The work has been carried out through prolonged and bitter controversy, and the echoes of this have not yet completely died down. Much of it has been necessarily destructive in character. The ground had to be cleared before any work of reconstruction became possible ; and the process of getting rid of old and time-honoured ideas and theories was a very painful and difficult one. Many people found it impossible to look beyond it to the end which it had in view. Now, however, it is to be hoped that we can regard the position more calmly. It may be said with confidence that wherever the subject is seriously studied there is now a large measure of agreement as to the results that have been attained, and as to the

great advance which they mark in the process of understanding and appreciating the Holy Scriptures.

Archæology

This position can be the more easily maintained in view of the new light which has been cast by modern archæological discovery on Bible history and on the composition of the sacred books. In Assyria and Babylonia, in Egypt and Palestine, the spade of the explorer has restored to us long-buried civilisations and enabled us to reconstruct the social and political conditions and relationships of those peoples with whom Israel came into closest contact. This is especially the case during the period from the eighth to the sixth century before Christ, when it is possible to confirm, illustrate, or correct from the inscriptions the story told in the Bible of the relations of the northern and southern kingdoms to each other and to their powerful neighbours Assyria and Babylonia. The discovery of the Code of Hammurabi[1] points to a very high degree of civilisation in Babylonia at a period long before the time of Moses. The very close affinities between this code and early Hebrew legislation show that the authors of the latter were not

[1] A Babylonian Law Code, discovered in 1902 on the site of the ancient Persepolis. Its date is uncertain, probably about 2000 B.C.

unmindful of what had been done among other peoples, and that they were prepared to use it freely but with discrimination. What concerns us, however, is not merely the fact that the Hebrew writers gathered their materials from these sources, but rather the spirit and method with which they handled them. In this respect there is a wide difference between the two codes, and it is the religious tone and sanction of the Hebrew legislation which gives to it both originality and force.

Other discoveries, like those of the Moabite Stone,[1] the Siloam Inscription,[2] the Tel-el-Amarna tablets,[3] have thrown much light on early Hebrew writing, and on the relations between Israel and the surrounding peoples. We now know that Palestine was deeply influenced by Babylonian civilisation long before the time of the immigration of the Children of Israel, and we have in cuneiform script commercial and diplomatic correspondence going on between the Canaanites and their Egyptian overlord. These and other records enable us to place the people of Israel in their true historical setting, and to explain many things in the Old Testament that would otherwise be

[1] A monument erected by Mesha, King of Moab, about 850 B.C. to commemorate his victories over Israel.

[2] A Hebrew inscription in the Tunnel of Siloam, discovered in 1880, probably contemporary with Hezekiah.

[3] Letters discovered in Egypt, and written in the fifteenth century B.C., showing that at that time the Babylonian language and script were used over a very wide area.

obscure. We cannot be sufficiently grateful for such helps to the understanding of the Scriptures, and even though they sometimes make it necessary for us to revise our conclusions and to abandon many cherished theories, they should be used to the full as among the surest means of enabling us to arrive at the truth.

Turning to the New Testament, we are almost bewildered by the amount and variety of the new material which modern discovery has put into our hands. The sands of Egypt have yielded up to the explorer vast quantities of writings, many of which are of great linguistic and literary interest, and all of them important from the light they throw on the common life of men and women in the early days of the Christian era. It is as though the waste-paper baskets of the time were emptied out before us. In the bills, letters, leases, wills, contracts, and miscellaneous memoranda that have come to light we have material for reconstructing the every-day life of men and women in those strata of society with which literature seldom concerns itself. But these are the very people with whom the New Testament is concerned, and it may be said quite freely that we now know them and their thought and the language which they spoke as they were never known before. "Until recently the men of this class were almost entirely lost to the historian. Now, however, thanks to the dis-

covery of their own authentic records, they have suddenly risen again from the rubbish mounds of the ancient cities, little market towns, and villages. They plead so insistently to be heard that there is nothing for it but to yield them calm and dispassionate audience. The chief and most general value of the non-literary written memorials of the Roman Empire is this:—They help us to correct the picture of the ancient world which we formed by viewing it, hitherto, exclusively from above. They place us in the midst of that class in which we have to think of the Apostle Paul and the early Christians gathering recruits. This statement, however, must not be pressed. Of course, among the inscriptions and papyri of that time there are many that do not come from the lower class, but owe their origin to Cæsars, generals, statesmen, municipalities, and rich people. But side by side with these texts lies evidence of the lower and middle classes, in countless depositions made by themselves, and in most cases recognisable at once as such by their contents or the peculiarity of their language. These are records of the peoples' speech, records of the insignificant affairs of insignificant persons. Peasants and artisans, soldiers and slaves, and mothers speak to us of their cares and labours. The unknown and the forgotten, for whom there was no room in the pages of the annals, troop into the lofty halls of our museums, and in the libraries, folio on folio,

are ranged the precious editions of the new texts." [1]

Between the Testaments

Other aids to the study of the New Testament are to be found in the wider knowledge of contemporary Judaism which is now available. The period between the two Testaments is known to us as it never was before, and is full of instruction; while the investigations which have been made into apocalyptic literature have helped to throw light on many old problems of New Testament interpretation. No doubt it is easy to lay too much stress on such " aids " as these, and that has often been done; but, wisely used, they all have their part in that more accurate and historical understanding of the New Testament, which is the object of all our study. Behind all the New Testament writers is a background of apocalyptic Judaism, Greek thought, and Roman organisation, with which we must be familiar before we can hope to interpret them aright. But, important as these considerations are, we must avoid the too common error of supposing that they can in themselves explain and account for the whole New Testament story. That story centres round Jesus Christ, His teaching and His work. The Person of Jesus Christ was the original

[1] Deissmann's " Light from the Ancient East," pp. 7 and 8.

motive force in Christianity, and was not the resultant of the action of any or all of these other forces which we have mentioned. No doubt Jesus Himself cast His teaching in forms suited to the age in which He lived, and those who came after Him were still more influenced in their presentation of Him and His work, by the time-spirit. But that is a very different thing from saying that the Christian religion was in any way merely a product of its age. The one thing to which the New Testament bears an unshakable witness is the original and creative personality of Jesus Christ. It is no doubt necessary to distinguish between the Gospel of Jesus and the gospel about Jesus, *i.e.*, between the teaching of Jesus Himself and the preaching of Jesus as Saviour and Lord such as we find in the apostolic writings, and which has not been without its influence on the Gospels themselves. It has to be admitted that the teaching of Jesus Himself and that of the Gospels about Jesus were both largely influenced by eschatological considerations. The doctrine of last things naturally determines much of the tone of this teaching, though the part it plays has been very greatly exaggerated in recent criticism of the Gospels. We have to remember that the mental attitude of the contemporaries of Jesus was very different from that which obtains in our day. They did not believe, as we do, in progress, but they did

believe in catastrophes. The coming of the Kingdom was visualised by them, not as a gradual development, but as a sudden and tremendous event. All the signs pointed to its imminence, and they could well believe that it would take place in their own lifetime. In the teaching of Jesus there are indications that He too regarded the coming of the Kingdom as an event in the immediate future, *e.g.*, " There are some of those standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God arrive with power." [1] In sharp contrast with this, however, are other sayings in which the Kingdom is compared to seed cast on the earth, and its consummation to the harvest which only takes place after the fruit is ripe.[2] This apparent contradiction raises the question as to which of these positions belongs to the primitive form of the teaching of our Lord, and as to how far that primitive eschatology has been modified by the evangelists writing under the influence of later events and experiences. There is no doubt that the doctrine of last things formed a very integral part of the teaching and outlook of Jesus, and that while He certainly regarded the Kingdom as a present reality He also looked to its consummation in the future. This event was not to be conceived as one that would take place naturally and without effort. It was something

[1] St. Mark ix. 1.
[2] St. Mark iv. 26—29.

that was to be prepared for by the disciples, something in which His own death would have a part to play. In other words, His outlook on the future was at once closely connected with, and at the same time served to modify, both His ethical and spiritual teaching. It is necessary, therefore, to take these facts into consideration and to give full weight to them in interpreting the mind of Christ as it is revealed to us in the first three gospels. As Dr. Moffatt says, " Jesus used not only apocalyptic language but apocalyptic ideas at certain moments of His life. If we cannot, without arbitrariness, read all His teaching and actions in the light of an eschatological enthusiasm, we cannot, without almost equal violence, eliminate the realistic eschatological hope from the record of His career. At the beginning, as at the end, He was sustained by the belief that the Kingdom was close at hand. This was the form taken by His faith in God's purpose of goodwill ; it was not merely the form into which the early Church, in the over-eagerness of its Messianic ardour, threw His teaching on the Kingdom. But the essential significance of the Kingdom for Jesus is not to be found by interpreting it in the light of earlier or contemporary apocalyptic hopes. The Kingdom varied even there with the particular conception of God, or of Messiah, and when Jesus took over this ancestral hope of Judaism, He modified it inevitably by connecting

it with His profounder conceptions of God's nature and of His own destiny. This transmutation of the idea gives the starting point for the development which culminated in the Fourth Gospel, by showing that the stress upon the inward and present aspect began, not with the early Church, but with Jesus Himself."[1] Considerations such as these are of the utmost importance, not only for interpreting the teaching of Jesus Himself, but for showing its true relation to the teaching of His followers. The whole subject is a very difficult one, but in a sense it gives us a key to New Testament interpretation, and becomes one among the means by which the reasonableness of a historical view of the Person of Jesus Christ may be established.

[1] " The Theology of the Gospels," p. 83.

CHAPTER II

THE HEBREW PEOPLE

From Tribe to Nation

The Bible sets before us the Hebrew people as the people of a Book and of a Faith. What their faith was, what it did for them, and what it has done through them for the world, these things are the burden of the Old Testament Scriptures. The value of these Scriptures for us to-day lies, as we have seen, in their religious significance, in the extent to which we can recover their original meaning and message and apply it to our own conditions and needs. What is important for us, therefore, in the Old Testament is the ideas which it enshrines concerning God and His relations with the world. But the treasure is in earthen vessels. The message comes to us through the vehicle of the people, and is moulded and conditioned by their fortunes and characteristics. We are, therefore, in the first instance, concerned with them and with their shaping under the hand of God for their great function in the world.

In this connection it is customary to use the familiar term "evolution." This is quite per-

missible, so long as we clearly understand what we mean by it. That the history of the people and of their religion shows a progressive development from lower and simpler to higher and more complex forms goes without saying. It is no disparagement to a religion to prove that it has grown from very obscure beginnings, any more than it is a disparagement to a man to say that he was once a babe "muling and puking in his mother's arms." But the important point is that there should be in the religion inherent forms capable of the after-development, and that, in the course of its history, it should come under the influences which are calculated to further such development. In other words, we have to note in the history of Israel, not merely the fact that the people had many points in common with other Semitic tribes, *e.g.*, Moab, Edom and Ammon, but also the fact that it was, in many respects, a peculiar people, and that its history and experience fitted it to play a part in world history to which these kindred peoples could never have aspired. It is this which gives to the people, as the vehicle of a religion, a very special interest, and compels us to study their development with unusual care.

The People and their God

It is now generally agreed that the Bible has but little to teach us as to the earliest stages in

the history of the people of Israel. The pre-Mosaic period is really pre-historic. All that we have there is a collection of traditions, legends, sagas, or folk-tales, written down centuries later than the time to which they refer. They were written, too, in the form that we have them, from a poetical and religious standpoint, and they reflect to a large extent both the religious temper and the habits of life of the age from which they spring. At the same time, we must beware of dismissing literature of this kind as being of no historical value whatever. Even tradition has its secrets, and it is possible by careful questioning to discover the nucleus of history which it contains, both for the age to which it refers and for that which gave it birth.

The Children of Israel were originally a nomad pastoral people of Semitic stock. They were one among a number of similar clans that had their home in Mesopotamia, and, in the course of their wanderings, gradually pressed west and south. Some of them crossed the Jordan and, as the Canaanites, settled down there to an agricultural and city life. Others moved further south and formed the collection of peoples known to us as Arabians. The Israelites, called by the Canaanites Hebrews, or men of the other side, lived a wandering pastoral life on the east of the Jordan. They, too, in time were driven south, probably under pressure of famine. They settled on

Egyptian territory and became subject to the Egyptians, who proved themselves no easy task-masters. Under the leadership of Moses they escaped from their servitude and returned to Palestine, where they fought their way to settlements both on the east and west of the Jordan.

It was this struggle with the "people of the land" that began the process of welding the Israelite clans into a nation. This process was continued during a period of some three hundred years, *i.e.*, from Moses to David. All through these years the Israelites were in closest possible contact with their neighbours, often fighting them, but influenced by them even more when they were at peace. When they first made their entry into the promised land they were at a comparatively low level of civilisation. They were shepherds and nomads, and they had to deal with a people living a settled agricultural life and dwelling in walled cities. The stories of their adventures, deliverance from Egypt, the wanderings in the wilderness, and the conquest of the promised land reflect something of the magnitude of their task. They serve to show also the secret of its accomplishment. It was in the service of the God Yahweh that these Israelite clans found their rallying point and the inspiration of their great enterprise. That there should have been a religious background to their action was, for a people at their stage of development, an

altogether usual thing. But the use they made of it and the consequences which followed were not usual. Under the leadership and teaching of Moses Israel had become the people of Yahweh. They had formed a covenant with Yahweh by which they bound themselves to His service, and He undertook to be their God and their guide to the promised land. That Yahweh had not hitherto been a recognised God of Israel appears quite clearly from the sacred narrative. He was a Kenite or Midianite deity, who is said to have appeared to Moses and commissioned him to become the leader of the Israelites and promised help in the task of delivering them from their bondage. There is no reason to question the fact that, underlying all the stories which gathered round the Exodus, is a great religious experience. It marked the beginning of a new day for Israel, and a complete breach at once with their past and with the religious surroundings of their present. It is known, too, by its fruits, in the new impulse which it gave towards nationalism, in the rousing of the spirit of the people to great deeds, and in endowing them with a purer worship and one more capable of ethical expression. Hitherto their religion had been that common to the Bedawin peoples of the East. Its ideals and practices are those of the desert, and they survive, *e.g.*, in the Rechabites, whose hostility to agriculture and settled habitations is a relic of

the ancient days. Yahweh Himself is a desert God whose home is on Sinai and who appears in the thunder and the storm. In the wanderings of His people He is ever present, a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. Though at first it is probable that only a small section of Israel proper came under the influence of this religious change, it so justified itself in the event that it came to dominate the whole people. The covenant with Yahweh was a most real and effective thing. It endured in spite of the vast changes which came about through the settlement in Canaan, and it survived the inevitable conflict with the religions of the people of the land. This was partly, no doubt, due to the power of the new consciousness of God involved in the new relationship and in the experiences resulting from it. But it was also due in part to the great creative religious personality of Moses, and to the fact that he became to his people the living exponent of the Divine Will. This was made manifest in the most practical ways. The man of God was both judge and priest, administering the oracles of Yahweh and impressing upon the Israelites the fact that Yahweh had chosen them to be His people. The work was not carried on without opposition and strife. The perpetual atmosphere of revolt and rebellion which we find in the Biblical story points to the fact that other heads of families resented the action of Moses, and

were only brought into the allegiance of Yahweh gradually and almost against their will. It is just what we should expect in the case of one clan God gradually assuming domination over a whole people or family of clans. That Moses and Yahweh won their way to this position, and in so doing made the Israelites into a nation, is a religious event of the first magnitude.

The New Nation

But this is only the summary statement of a very long process. All through the period covered by the books of Joshua and Judges the Israelites were working out their salvation in conflict with the surrounding peoples. It is one of the miracles of history that they should have absorbed the Canaanites rather than have been absorbed by them. As we have already seen, the Canaanites were their superiors in what we call civilisation, and the only clue to the success of the invaders is to be found in the ethical superiority of their religion. Moses had done more for them than give a new name to their God. He had at least begun to fill the name with a new content, and gave to their religion the promise and potency of higher things which was afterwards so signally fulfilled. In many respects, no doubt, the religion of Yahweh was but little removed from that of the neighbouring tribes. Their God was to the

Israelites very much what Chemosh was to Moab. He was a War God, a Lord of Hosts, their leader and inspirer on many a stricken field; and we may well believe that it was their successes in battle which first confirmed the people in their faith, and justified their sole allegiance to Yahweh. He was, too, a Nature deity, manifesting Himself in storm and fire, dwelling on Sinai and coming thence to do battle. But at the same time He was a God who stood for justice as well as for power, and who through His representatives gave laws to His people. Though the accounts we have of the Mosaic law are all much later than the time of Moses, and contain features which represent the time from which the literature arose rather than that of which it speaks, there is no doubt that Moses taught the people in the name of Yahweh at least the elements of social morality. It was the slightly higher standard which they attained in this respect which gave them the superiority over their enemies and started them on their long career. At the same time the legislation of the Mosaic period was in all probability designed rather to establish and stereotype the new religious position on the basis of past custom than to make any very marked ethical advance. On this assumption the Mosaic Decalogue has been ingeniously restored as follows:—

1. Thou shalt worship no other God.
2. Thou shalt make thee no molten gods.

3. The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep.

4. Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest.

5. Thou shalt observe the feast of weeks ;

6. And the feast of ingathering at the year's end.

7. Thou shalt not offer the blood of any sacrifice with unleavened bread.

8. The Sacrifice of the Passover shall not be left till the morning.

9. The first of the first fruits of thy ground shalt thou bring unto the house of Yahweh thy God.

10. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk.

The conquest of Canaan undoubtedly played a great part in welding the Israelite tribes into a unity. But it was a sporadic and piecemeal business. The condition of things represented in the book of Judges shows what a long way had yet to be travelled before Israel could be spoken of as a nation. But the groundwork of a possible unity had been laid in the possession of a common cause and a common faith. This finds striking illustration in the life and work of Samuel, with whom we find ourselves on really historical ground. He was at once judge, prophet, and seer, one who could interpret both the will and Torah (or Law) of Yahweh, and who helped in this way to develop the nascent consciousness of the

nation. In the books of Samuel and Kings, while some of the narratives belong to a late age there are others which may be regarded as nearly contemporary with the events described. From them we gather the new place now occupied by the prophets and the change which was coming over the prophets themselves. The taunt "Is Saul also among the prophets" marks the popular sense of the inferiority of the wild Dervish type of prophecy then not uncommon and the feeling for something higher. Men like Samuel, Nathan, and Gad, and later Elijah and Elisha, are prophets of Yahweh, not only in the sense that they are devotees of His worship, but exponents of His will. They are there to pass moral judgments in His name, and the importance of their work both in raising and unifying the moral standard of the people must not be overlooked.

Kings and Priests

A more obvious influence in this direction is to be found in the rise of the monarchy. It is not difficult to read between the lines of the varying accounts of the election of Saul, the son of Kish, and to realise the inevitableness of some such step if the Philistines were not to take away the name and place of Israel. Under Saul and David Israel became a nation in a sense that had not been possible before, and their strength and unity

were symbolised by David's action in making the strong fortress of Jebus, or Jerusalem, the centre of the national life.[1] The contrast between the national sentiment represented in David's Lament over Saul and the picture of the warring of the scattered tribes given in the Song of Deborah well illustrates the change which had come over Israel through the conflicts of the intervening years.

As the national consciousness grew stronger the unifying effect of the religion became more marked. We have already seen how in the earlier stages of its development the people of Israel were not very different from their Semitic neighbours. They were devoted to Yahweh very much, for example, as Moab was devoted to Chemosh. But there came a time when the ways parted and Israel refused to follow the example of her neighbours and add to the worship of Yahweh that of the gods of other peoples with whom they had dealings. The lead in this matter was given by Elijah. When Ahab, who had married a Tyrian princess, and so contracted an alliance with Tyre, wished to consolidate the alliance by introducing among his people the worship of the Tyrian god, the prophet withstood him to the face, and successfully asserted the supremacy of Yahweh for Israel. It was in this way that the principle of monolatry, *i.e.*, the one God for one people,

[1] 2 Sam. v. 5.

became finally established, and so prepared for the monotheism of later times. For the moment, however, we are chiefly concerned with its influence in consolidating the national life and resisting the dangerous influences of polytheism. It was because the other Semitic peoples failed to make this stand that they became absorbed into the stronger nationalities around them. Israel alone resisted the temptation to worship the gods of the nations, and so kept her national existence even when her independence was lost.

The Prophets

With the prophets of the eighth century this process was carried a step further and higher. They foreshadowed a new relationship between Yahweh and His people. While expressing in the most explicit terms Yahweh's care over Israel, they insisted, at the same time, that He had another end in view than the safety and welfare of the chosen people. In other words, the election of Israel now came to be understood as an election not merely to privilege but to responsibility. The nation was not an end in itself, but a means to the furtherance of Yahweh's plans. This opened the way for the idea that the nation might be subjected to discipline in order to fit it for the work which it was intended, in the providence of God, to accomplish. It is the conscious-

ness of this which gives rise to the startling declaration of Amos:[1] "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore will I visit upon you your iniquities." From this time forward we have to note the rise of a new consciousness of the nation as an instrument in the hands of its God for higher ends than its own well-being. The sense of a great moral purpose to be furthered by its destinies is now more or less clearly foreshadowed. The growth of an ethical monotheism under the prophets not only saved Israel from polytheism and from the lower moral standards which accompany it, but also served still further to emphasise the national unity and the national mission. As it came to be understood that the guiding principle of Yahweh's action was righteousness, and not merely the interests of a single people, it followed that the people held themselves bound to carry out this principle, and were to be judged according as they failed or succeeded in the task. The Deuteronomic legislation, with its insistence on a centralised worship, and on the fact that "Yahweh our God is one Yahweh," served the same great end of unity. The exile brought Israel face to face with the heathen world, gave to the people a new sense of their superiority, and at the same time a consciousness of their mission to the world. Israel is Yahweh's servant and messenger

[1] Amos, iii. 2.

to mankind. But he had been blind to his opportunity and deaf to Yahweh's call; therefore he had suffered and been given over to the spoilers.

But Amos does not confine these judgments to Israel.[1] Yahweh has to do also with the surrounding peoples, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, Damascus, Philistia, and Tyre. On these, too, he passes judgment, and that not because they are idolatrous, but for their iniquities, for violence, cruelty, and treachery. The same spirit and wide moral outlook are found in Hosea, and thus the barriers of a merely particularist and national religion are broken down and the way is opened up for a universal and individual faith. Hosea, indeed, marks an advance upon Amos in regarding Israel as a moral personality with whom Yahweh has direct dealings, and who is the object of His loving-kindness and tender care.

This personalising of the nation becomes more pronounced in the later prophets. To Isaiah Yahweh is the God of the whole earth, and deals with Assyria and Egypt as pawns upon His chessboard. But Israel is His special care and He the Holy One of Israel. This has now come to mean, however, not that Yahweh specially favours Israel, but that He uses Israel for His own purposes, even to the point of securing the ruin and destruction of the nation in order that His

[1] *Cf.* Amos, chs. i. and ii.

righteousness may be maintained. The means by which this end will be accomplished is a new Zion to be built up out of the righteous remnant of the people. The aim and function of the renewed nation will be the fuller maintenance of the righteousness and glory of Yahweh.

This sacred vocation of Israel is more fully interpreted by the writers of the exilic period. The discipline to which the nation is subjected at the hands of Yahweh looks forward always to the fulfilment of His purposes. This is to be the work of the new Israel that is to arise out of the ashes of the old. In the so-called Messianic prophecies, side by side with the figure of the Davidic King who is to rule the new Israel, we have to reckon also with the personified nation as the suffering servant of Yahweh.[1] It represents the true or ideal Israel which shall permeate the whole people with its own higher aims until the people is able to take up the commission of Yahweh and become "a light to lighten the Gentiles." This whole conception represents considerable advance in the interpretation of the relation of the people to Yahweh and of their mission in the world. It gave to their theology a new and deeper understanding of the function of suffering and discipline, and an idea of God that was genuinely universalistic. Alongside of it, however, must be set the growth of a new nationalism

[1] *Cf.* Isaiah liii.

which narrowed down the conception of the people's status and function. Though some such conception was a necessary condition of the preservation of the people and of welding them together as an instrument for God's purposes, it tended at the same time to stereotype both their religious thought and practice. What went on under the hammer of affliction and persecution no doubt tempered the spiritual life of the people, but it was a hardening process all the same, and resulted in that narrow and rigid Judaism characteristic of the last decades of the old dispensation.

The Rise of Judaism

The work of Ezekiel and the promulgation of the Priestly Code[1] were both influential in producing this new reading of Israel's function and destiny. Contact with heathenism tended to drive the people in upon themselves and prepared the way for the idea that they were a separated or holy community with the true sanctuary of Yahweh in their midst. Israel thus became a church rather than a nation, hedged round with a strict legalism which permitted no encroachments. The insistence upon circumcision and the strictness of the laws of purification all tended in this direction. After the return from the exile it became necessary under the pressure of circum-

[1] A Priestly revision of the Mosaic Law, about 444 B.C.

stances to substitute a hierarchy for the old ideal of a monarchy, and under Ezra the dream of Ezekiel began to be fulfilled of a holy people in a holy land. The outward sign of this was the rebuilding of the Temple in the year 516. This secured a centralised and uniform worship, and the new sanctuary became a natural rallying point for the nation's religious zeal. It was even hailed by some of the later prophets, *e.g.*, Haggai, as marking the inauguration of the Messianic realm. Such hopes, however, were altogether premature. The restored people were in no position to stand firm against the impact of their heathen surroundings. It was not until they found a strong man as governor in Nehemiah that the opponents of the law, both domestic and foreign, were effectively dealt with and the ideal of Ezra began to be realised. The prohibition of marriage with the surrounding heathen, the rigorous observance of the Sabbath and the Sabbatical year, and the regulations for the support of the priesthood were all measures which helped to settle the nation on its new foundation as a people or House of God. The old covenant with Yahweh was renewed, in far stricter terms, and the observance of the law of Yahweh became the test both of loyalty and faith. At the same time, in spite of the growing exclusiveness of Judaism, the post-exilic period saw the rise of a wider universalism. As we have already seen, the building of the Temple raised

some extravagant hopes which were not destined to be fulfilled. But it also led to a more lasting conviction that Israel had a message for the heathen, and that Zion might become the spiritual metropolis of the world. Both prophets and psalmists look forward to the coming of whole nations into allegiance to Yahweh, and to a day when the knowledge of the true God shall " cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

Another interesting development of this period is seen in the fact that religion became a deeper, more personal, and more individual thing. As the nation became less of a political and more of a spiritual unity, the spiritual welfare of the individuals composing it became more and more important. The older prophets and teachers of Israel had been chiefly concerned with the nation. The individual was only a member of a community, and, as long as all was well with the community, it was presumed that all would be well with him. It was Jeremiah first who was forced, partly by the circumstances of his own life and partly by the condition of the people around him, to reflect more deeply on the place of the individual in the Divine economy and to assume for the individual a real measure of responsibility. His teaching was carried on by others and was accentuated by the sharp discipline of the exile. Men began to realise the need for a personal religious life and for a new standard of conduct.

As the nation became less important, it was easier to assume that Yahweh took some interest in individual men, and that it was possible and right for the individual to draw near unto Him. In the restored worship of the Temple, in the simpler services of the synagogues, in the study of the new sacred literature, and in the daily effort to fulfil the law, men found that which seemed to satisfy their deepest needs and to assure them of the help and favour of Yahweh. This was secured to them no longer merely as members of the community, but in virtue of their own service and prayers. The fact serves to account for the fervent piety and intensely devotional spirit of many of the writers of the post-exilic period. It is from this period, often mistakenly regarded as one of mere barren legalism, that the greater part of the Psalter dates, and in it the religious possibilities of Judaism are clearly enough reflected. The psalms show how a passionate devotion to the law was for a time, at any rate, quite compatible with, if indeed it did not actually produce, a real thirst for God and a very high standard of spiritual life.

The Later Judaism

The later stages of pre-Christian Judaism were marked by the emergence of Scribism, and by the growth of Jewish eschatology. The increasing

importance of the Law attached great honour to the teachers of the Law, or Scribes, as they were called. These men were found in connection with the synagogues at all important centres of Jewish life. They became the accredited exponents of the Law and they were largely concerned in its enforcement. To them was due the wide expansion of its scope and its adaptation to all the circumstances of human experience, until there grew up a law of custom (*halachah*) alongside of the Torah itself and of almost equally binding authority.

It was this enhancement of the Law, in combination with the political upheavals caused by the struggle against Antiochus and the Maccabean revolt, which helped the development of apocalyptic in later Judaism. This to some extent took the place of prophecy, and had its own doctrine of last things, which must be carefully distinguished from that of the prophets. It is important also as creating that atmosphere of expectancy and unrest which did much to condition the form of early Christian teaching. The Maccabean victory awakened afresh those long dormant hopes of a renewed and liberated Israel which from this time forth became a real inspiration to the people in all their trials. The most important of these apocalypses are the book of Enoch (*circ.* 170—100 B.C.), Judith (*circ.* 130 B.C.), Tobit (*circ.* 110 B.C.), the Psalms of Solomon (*circ.* 63—37 B.C.), and in

the first century A.D. Baruch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Second Esdras, the Second Maccabees, the Assumption of Moses, and the Ascension of Isaiah. In these books the strictly Messianic idea is not central and is somewhat vague in form. They point to Yahweh as the deliverer of His people, and to a future which will see Israel raised to supremacy among the nations, and a judgment of Yahweh on the ungodly. With the details of their message and with the strange imagery which it is enforced we are not concerned here. But some study of these books is entirely necessary for a proper understanding of Biblical apocalyptic (*e.g.*, the books of Daniel and Revelation), and of the atmosphere in which much of the New Testament was written.

CHAPTER III

THE WITNESS TO GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is a familiar saying "like God like people." But there is also truth in the converse of it, "like people like God." And the two together contain in brief form the whole problem of revelation. The God a man or a nation worships is an index of the moral and spiritual character of his worshippers; and the conception they form of Him is conditioned by their character and state of development. There is thus a strong subjective element in all religion. This is what we mean when we speak of it as a matter of experience, and when we say that religion is natural to man. He is a religious animal, possesses spiritual faculties, which, like all his faculties, must be exercised or they will perish. The appeal of religion is justified because there is that in man which responds to it, and because it develops his power of responding. But this does not mean that religion is only subjective, an emanation of man's nature to which there is no reality to correspond. It is something more than an empty cry in the dark. There is an answer to the cry, and that answer is

God. Man's religious development is thus a co-operative process in which both God and man are active. But God's action is conditioned by man's weakness and need. He speaks, but it is in language that men can understand. He feeds babes with milk, and acts on the principle of the words, " I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." He does not force men's minds or consciences, work miracles to prove His power, or write His will on the broad face of the heavens. His revelation is like hidden treasure, and it is good that men should spend themselves in digging for it. " It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," and His truth is only made known by slow and even painful process— " Here a little and there a little, line upon line, and precept upon precept."

It is only in the light of such considerations as these that we can hope to understand aright the witness to God of the Old Testament. As we have already seen, the real business of the Old Testament is with God and the unfolding of His will. The process is a long, slow, and intricate one. The writers who record it have themselves often but little idea of what they are really doing, and their message has to be picked out from a maze of confused records. But the general result is never really in doubt. Here is a revelation of God which, despite its limitations, may be judged by its fruits to be supreme, and a story of religious

experience that still does its work. It is in all cases suited to the needs of the people through whom it came, and it is progressive, leading them on to ever higher life and thought and preparing the way for that larger revelation which was to be made in Jesus Christ. To Old Testament religion the world owes an incalculable debt, not merely for the fruit it bore in the fulness of the times, but for the record it has left of man's dealing with God and God's with man. This forms a storehouse of religious knowledge on which men will continue to draw for their guidance and comfort so long as the world lasts.

The God of the Hebrews

The Hebrew conception of God in its earliest stages had the closest possible affinity with that of the Semitic peoples generally. It was not a monotheism in the strict sense of the term, but what has been variously called monolatry, henotheism, or polydemonism. Its conception of a national Deity who should alone be worshipped by the people of His nation was quite compatible with acknowledgment of other deities for other nations. Fundamentally the religion of the Semites was but a form of that animism which is characteristic of primitive religion generally. They believed in a Divine Spirit which dwelt in places, persons, or material objects and in and

through these made Himself known to men. The traces of this earliest stage of the religion are to be found scattered throughout the Old Testament. To it the whole pre-Mosaic religion of Israel belonged, but the references to it are incidental and come from a later age which looked back upon it as a stage out of which the people had grown, and judged it by the higher standard which they had reached. Thus it comes about that we only hear of many of the cults and practices of the ancient faith from those who had learned to condemn them in the light of their own day, though for the time to which they belonged they were legitimate and innocent enough.

The earliest names for God are El, the Strong One ; Elohim, a plural name which came to be generally used as equivalent simply to God ; Baal Lord or Owner, used often of Yahweh as well as of other Semitic deities ; Adon Lord ; Melekh King. Under these various titles God was worshipped at special places and in connection with different sacred objects. Bethel, Beersheba, Shechem, Mamre, Mizpeh, Horeb, and many other localities were holy because of their association with deity. This sanctity generally rested on some ancient legend of a theophany, but it should be remembered also that primitive peoples could hardly conceive of a God without assigning to him a local habitation, and the early

Hebrews were no exception to this rule. Sometimes also the connection of a locality with the Deity was due to its possession of some feature which in itself was supposed to be sacred, a well, or spring, or strangely-shaped rock, or grove of trees. Evergreens were especially used in this way, their rustling leaves making them specially fit abodes of the oracles of the god (*cf. terebinths*, Gen. xii. 6). Sometimes in the absence of trees sacred poles (*asherim*) were set up to represent them. These served much the same purpose as sacred pillars (*mazzeboth*, Arabic, Nosb), which were sometimes natural and sometimes artificial stones or cairns. At all such sacred places, or objects, sacrifice was offered, and they came to be regarded as necessary adjuncts to worship. Sometimes the rites connected with them were impure, and not infrequently the objects themselves were worshipped as even something more than dwelling places of the Divine. This was the less objectionable in early times, because there is no doubt that the Hebrews were accustomed to the use of sacred images such as the *ephod* and *teraphim*. These appear to have been small idols used mostly for the casting of lots or the consultation of the Divine oracle. Probably, however, these, together with the representation of Yahweh in the form of a calf or bull, belong to a somewhat later stage of religious development.

Sacrifices might be offered to Yahweh at any

of the sacred or high places (*Bamoth*), and it was not until a very late period that the worship of the national God was confined to the Temple at Jerusalem. These sacrifices were vegetable or animal, and sometimes probably in the early period human. The story of Jephthah's daughter points in this direction, as do also the references to passing children through the fire, as the Phœnicians did to Moloch. The important thing in the sacrifice was the shedding of blood, and this represented a communion between the tribe or family concerned and the God. It was the mark of their blood relationship, and not merely the sharing of a common meal. Hence arose the idea of a covenant between Israel and Yahweh which developed for itself so deep a spiritual meaning and function in later days. In the same way circumcision was a blood rite common to all the Semitic peoples. Originally it was a means of initiation into the full rights of the family or clan, and not until later times was it definitely connected with the worship of Yahweh and made binding on all His people. With the sacrifices, and especially with the various means of consulting the God, there grew up a number of sacred persons, enchanters, soothsayers, seers, priests, and Levites, the forerunners of the prophets and priests of later times.

It is never wise to despise the day of small things, and we must not disparage the religion

of Israel because it had these lowly beginnings, and runs back into the common primitive faith of all mankind. That the soil out of which the greatest religion in the world grew should have been the common soil of human instinct and desire is a natural thing enough. What is singular in the case of Israel is that the development from these origins should have followed a course so different from that of any other Semitic people and reached results so much higher. This process of development is what we have to study in the Old Testament, and the various factors in it we have to distinguish are the history and fortunes of the people themselves, the special quality of their religious genius, and the work in and on them of the Spirit of God.

Yahweh and His Worship

As we have already seen, the real beginning of the religious life of Israel was the exodus from Egypt under Moses, and the new revelation of God marked by the new name Yahweh. It is probable that this name was not altogether unfamiliar. Whether it belonged to the deity of the family of Moses or, as some think, to that of the tribe of Joseph, it soon became a rallying point for the people as a whole for the work of their deliverance. Of this period in their history we only have accounts dating from some centuries

later, and naturally coloured by later experience. But the memory of bondage and the consciousness of a great redemption from it are too deeply rooted in the heart of the nation to be anything but real. It is expressed in the old confession: "A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there few in number, and became there a nation great, mighty, and populous: and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and we cried unto Yahweh the God of our fathers, and Yahweh heard our voice and saw our affliction, and our toil and our oppression: and Yahweh brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders."[1] These words have stood for centuries as representing to the Jews their genesis as a nation. The creative and prophetic personality of Moses and the new and deeper conception of God for which he and his work stood were alike responsible, not only for the rescue of the people from bondage, but for starting them on a new and grander career. Too much importance must not be attached to the new name for God which Moses made current. The meaning of Yahweh is obscure. It is either "He who causes to be," or, more probably, "He who will be." As Professor Robertson Smith

[1] Deut, xxvi. 5.

remarks, it seems to say, " no words can sum up all that Yahweh will be to His people." This vagueness, however, must not be taken to connote any new spiritual view of God's person. The conception formed of Yahweh was not a very lofty one. It was rather His new relation to Israel, His superiority over other gods, and His willingness to deliver the people from their bondage that started them on a new and wider religious development. Yahweh was looked upon as the leader of the people in time of war, and in peace as their ruler and judge. His will was represented in a Law which it was their duty to keep and in which were found the roots of a new social and personal morality. Yahweh is a God of the wilderness and has His dwelling place on Sinai. From thence He goes forth to lead His people. His face, or presence, and His angel are the forms in which He manifests Himself, and He is thus localised in His ark. The ark was a sacred box containing an image of Yahweh or a holy stone from Sinai, which served to give a visible and material guarantee of His presence. The accounts given in the Old Testament of the cult of Yahweh in the wilderness have been largely coloured by the ideas of a later time, but there is reason to believe in the existence of the Tent of Meeting where sacrifice was made for the purpose of renewing the covenant between Yahweh and the people and where the oracles of Yahweh could be consulted.

There was also a place of judgment (En Mishpat) at Kadesh Barnea, where cases were decided and the Law of Yahweh was promulgated by the mouth of Moses. It was this view of Yahweh as a God of righteousness and as giving the law to His own people of whom He was Father, Lord, and Saviour that became the special characteristic of Mosaism. We must not read into the conception thus outlined the ethical ideas of later times, but even without doing this we can hardly exaggerate its importance. It was the beginning of that higher and moralised conception of deity which was the salt of the Hebrew faith, and distinguished it for all time from the religion of the other Semitic peoples. In it is to be found the secret of the endurance of the Old Testament religion.

The Conflict of Religions

We have already seen how the conquest of Canaan and the change from a nomadic pastoral to a settled agricultural mode of life reacted on the religion of Israel. In many ways the change was not beneficial. The cult of Yahweh resembled so nearly the forms of religion among the Canaanites that it was almost inevitably affected by them. It was quite natural that Yahweh should be worshipped as the Baal of Israel, and that with rites which were customary in the worship of the local

Baalim or lords of the soil. Thus in the unsettled period between the death of Moses and the setting up of the monarchy religion in Israel became a kind of syncretism the traces of which long remained. At the same time the dependence of the people on the cultivation of the soil brought them into ever closer relations with the God who secured to them the fruits of their labour, and it was natural to worship Yahweh at the old and honoured shrines of the Canaanite deities, *e.g.*, Dan, Beersheba, Gilgal, Bethel, etc. At the various high places worship was offered to Yahweh at rude altars of earth and stones, and sacrifices were paid in the form of offerings of meat, cereals, or drink. Carved or molten images were used in the worship, and the fact that these sometimes took the shape of a calf or bull points to Canaanitish influence. The act of worship was genuinely social, belonged to the whole tribe or family, and was led by its headman. The offerings were used for a social meal, which was the occasion of much rejoicing. At this period the religion of the people was generally one of joyous confidence in Yahweh's care and bounty, and so long as things went well and happily the cult tended to become more and more sensuous. It was in a natural reaction from this that sects like the Nazirites and Rechabites arose. They stood for a more austere type of religion, and represented the earlier nomadic ideals as over against those of

Canaanite civilisation. It was in connection with this temper of revolt that the earlier prophets did their work. They sought to draw the people back to the purer form of Yahweh worship and away from the tendency to sink their religion to the level of their neighbours. Many of these prophets (*nebiim*) no doubt were hardly distinguishable from those of the surrounding peoples. They were diviners, fanatics, dealers in magic, and did not stand very high in the popular estimation. But among them were exceptional men like Samuel and Elijah, whose work left its mark on the religious development of the people and prepared the way for the higher service of the later prophets. Samuel, for example, was seer and judge as well as prophet in the then accepted sense of the term. He helped to consolidate the worship of Yahweh as a God of righteousness and to make known His oracles to the people. He was the virtual founder of the monarchy, and in so doing he acted not merely from political motives and in order to give the nation a central rallying point, but also that the king might become Yahweh's representative, and through him the people and their God might obtain a closer and more effective alliance. The king as the chosen and anointed of Yahweh had also his special task to fulfil in mediating the will of Yahweh to His people and keeping them true to their allegiance. One of the first tasks of the early monarchy was

the building of the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, and this was the last stage in the process of localising the worship of Yahweh in the land, though it was not until many years later that it became centralised in the one place. In the first instance, no doubt, the Temple was of the nature of a shrine for the personal worship of the king and was attached to the palace much in the manner of the Baal temples of the Canaanites, but it soon assumed a more important *rôle* and stood for the fact that Yahweh alone was the God to be worshipped in Jerusalem. To maintain this position was the work of the prophetic party in Israel. When it was threatened by the introduction of the worship of the Syrian Baal under Ahab and Jezebel their action was strongly and successfully opposed by Elijah, and the cause of Yahweh for which he contended was practically secured for many generations.

Yahweh and the Prophets

A great advance in Israel's conception of Yahweh was made by the later prophets. These were men of insight as well as foresight. They saw in the fortunes of the nation, as well as in their own personal experience, the guiding hand of God. It was not for nothing that they lived in times of political upheaval and perplexity. In their day Israel became but a pawn in the game which

great nations were playing. Their eyes were turned perforce to Syria and Assyria and Egypt as well as to the smaller neighbouring peoples. As they looked out beyond the boundaries of their own land, and saw its destinies bound up with those of other nations, they saw also the jurisdiction of Yahweh widened. Their conception of His righteousness came to involve discipline as well as favour, and their estimate of His person was more intimate and more lofty. In order to understand their message, therefore, we must learn to read them in close connection with the tangled history of their time. They spoke and wrote mainly for their own day, and they were concerned with the future only as the child of the present. The burden of their preaching was "Thus saith the Lord," and the value of it lay in the nature of the God whose word they proclaimed and in their view of His relations with His own people and with their enemies around them. What they learnt of God in the experience of their own hearts and lives they transferred to the wider stage of history, and so reached the conception of a theocracy which played a great part in the religious development of the future. Amos, for example, boasted that he was no prophet nor son of a prophet, *i.e.*, he did not belong to any prophetic caste or school, and yet he had heard the voice of Yahweh calling him like a roaring lion to denounce the sins of the peoples,

and lead Israel to a purer worship and a more ethical faith. He preached Yahweh as a God of righteousness and proclaimed a day of Yahweh that would be a day of judgment, darkness and not light. So Hosea, out of the bitter experience of a faithless wife whom his heart's love would not let go, reached a new and lofty conception of the loving-kindness of Yahweh. He was the husband of His people, and though they had been unfaithful His love never failed. It was His everlasting purpose to restore them to ways of righteousness and peace. Isaiah built on the foundations thus laid by his predecessors. To him Yahweh was the God of the whole earth and a God of righteousness before He was God of Israel. His special name, "the Holy One of Israel," took up and transfigured the familiar popular ideas. Isaiah gave to the term "Holiness"—a term hitherto no more than a mere synonym for the Divine—an ethical content, and Israel became only the vehicle for the carrying through of Yahweh's purpose of righteousness and judgment for the world. This new light on Yahweh's ethical character and aims cast its shadow in a deeper conception of sin both national and individual. The prophet regarded himself as a man of unclean lips because he dwelt among a people of unclean lips, and his prophetic mission was to rouse the people to a sense of their peril and to show them that Yahweh, because He was

righteous, was also a forgiving God. But forgiveness did not mean any condoning of sin. The sinful people Yahweh would destroy if they continued in their sin. Israel was not necessary to Him. His judgment would do its work upon the sinners, though out of the remnant of them He would build up a new and holier Zion. In the wider range and more intensely ethical character which he gave to Yahweh's action, Isaiah made a very real contribution to the development of the theology of Israel.

The reform movement under Josiah, which took shape in the Deuteronomic legislation and finally centralised the worship of Yahweh in the Temple at Jerusalem, marked another stage in the progress of the idea of God. It gave a new and deeper meaning to the conception of His holiness and tended to bind Him still more closely to His people. This found further expression in Jeremiah's teaching of the new covenant, which in its turn was rendered more binding by the codification of the hitherto unwritten Torah. In the new service of the Law and in the worship of the Temple men found the means towards that new and more individual relation with Yahweh which the earlier religion had lacked. The more intimate and personal note which is so marked a feature in many of the psalms now became more possible and frequent.

The Exile

But it is not until the exilic and post-exilic prophets that Israel's conception of God reaches its full development. For the religious life and thought of Israel the exile was a blessing in disguise. It enabled them to get rid of those alien elements which had long threatened the purity of their faith, it widened their whole spiritual horizon, and at the same time it narrowed down both faith and worship in such a way as to secure for both a permanence that would otherwise have been impossible. The discipline of sorrow and suffering served also to deepen the religious sense of the people and to prepare them to receive the more spiritual teaching of the prophets. Religion became increasingly a thing of heart and life. Material sacrifices and ritual gave way in favour of doing God's will. In the teaching of Ezekiel we have a new and wider conception of Yahweh's holiness. The honour of His name is bound up with the redemption of His people and with making them a testimony to the nations of the earth.[1] "I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am Yahweh." "And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they trespassed against Me."

[1] Ezek. xxxviii. 23, and xxxix. 23.

In the new relations between Yahweh and His sinning people we have the beginnings of a deeper doctrine both of His righteousness and His grace. Ezekiel, it must be remembered, was priest as well as prophet, and it was under his influence very largely that the priestly school elaborated the new law of holiness, and the view of Israel's history, duty, and destiny which found expression in the Priestly Code (572—444 B.C.). In this document Israel is regarded as a holy people, separated unto Yahweh, and organised for His purposes, a Church rather than a nation, and with a mission to the world.

Another very striking development during this period is found in the second Isaiah, the great prophet of the exile (Isa. xl.—lxvi.). His mission is to set forth Yahweh as a God of comfort and redemption, the Mighty One of Israel who saves the afflicted and oppressed. This prophet takes up the name Servant of Yahweh, the proud title of the whole people of Israel, and applies it especially to the remnant within Israel—the true people of God. This servant is to be Yahweh's light to the Gentiles and His salvation to the ends of the earth. But the servant's mission in the earth will only be accomplished by suffering. His suffering, however, is vicarious. It will lead the people to penitence and reform, and will end in finally establishing the will and purposes of Yahweh. The strongly individual picture which

is drawn of the suffering servant (*e.g.*, in ch. liii.) may have been suggested by the experience of the prophet Jeremiah, and is rightly held to foreshadow the work of one who was Son of God and Saviour of men. In the school of adversity Israel learnt afresh the meaning of suffering, and attained to a larger and more universal conception of redemption.

Judaism

With the return from the exile religion took on a new phase, and gradually hardened into the familiar Judaism of the closing years of the old dispensation. The building of the second Temple and the consequent reorganisation of worship and ritual seemed to mark a new departure, and set the seal on the establishment of Israel as a holy people with its visible centre in the sanctuary. The prophet Haggai even saw in it the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom. But the enthusiasm of the restoration did not last long. It was followed by a reaction which seemed to destroy all these high hopes and prophetic ideals. The threatened danger, however, was averted by the work of Ezra and Nehemiah. The main reforms which they secured were abstention from intermarriage with "the people of the land," the observance of the Sabbath, and the sabbatical year, and an adequate provision for the Temple service and ministers. The Book of the Law

(our present Pentateuch), which had been compiled in Babylon, was imposed on the people as regulative of their social and religious life. They became the people of the Law, and in its observance they found the sum of their well-being. Everything now tended to separate them off from other nations and to make them a peculiar people. The insistence on circumcision, the observance of the Sabbath, the Law of Holiness, the holy seasons, sacrifices, and ceremonies all served this end. But considering the circumstances in which the Jews found themselves after the exile it cannot be said that this rigid legalism served anything but a good purpose. It preserved the spirit of the prophetic religion from destruction and decay, and helped it to become the inalienable possession of the whole people. If it stereotyped the worship of Yahweh and made it a formality, it tended to preserve religion as a daily blessing and an incentive to goodness. It was under the ægis of this legalism that some of the finest features of Jewish legalism were developed, and in a very real sense the Law became a schoolmaster to lead men to Christ.

After the return from the exile Jewish religion came more directly under the influence of the surrounding paganism. Persian ideas in Palestine, and Greek thought among the Jews of the Dispersion, were both alike active, and had the result of intensifying the Puritan and exclusive

spirit on the one hand, and on the other of leading to a wider universalism. The book of Jonah is a good example of this latter tendency, and the growth of the synagogues, the worship in which was open to Gentiles, led to important results in Greek-speaking centres like Alexandria and Antioch. It is to this period, too, that we must trace the beginnings of the Wisdom literature, which often dealt with problems that had been accentuated if not raised by contact with Persian and Greek ideas, as well as by the discipline through which Israel had passed. The same experiences also account for the marked development of personal religion, which is so prominent a feature in the later psalms. In this literature the prophetic ideas as to Yahweh are reproduced only in a more intimate and personal form. Religion as represented by the Law of Yahweh is not now merely a great national asset, but is the possession and delight of the individual soul. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom for men as well as for peoples, and those who walk in His ways and put their trust in Him find in so doing the solution of the apparent contradictions of the human lot. The fact that prosperity is not always the lot of the righteous, and that Yahweh's favour often takes the form of discipline, is one that came upon devout souls as a discovery and greatly affected their religious outlook. The book of Job and psalms like the 73rd deal with

this problem. The average teaching of the Law, as reflected, *e.g.*, in the book of Proverbs, had encouraged the belief that righteousness necessarily meant prosperity, and that sin was followed by adversity. When this facile view was overthrown by experience it led to a deeper trust in Providence and to a better understanding of God's ways with men. It was in a closer touch with God and truer faith in Him that the solution of the problem was found.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In studying the Old Testament we must clear our minds of prepossessions. Our aim is not to maintain any theories as to its origin, purpose, or meaning, but simply to get at the facts. If we are to understand the Scriptures, and to use them to the best purpose, we must listen to what they say to us as well as to what men tell us about them. The Old Testament, it should be remembered, is not the sacred book of the Hebrew religion in the same sense that the Koran is of Islam or the New Testament of Christianity. The Hebrew religion existed long before the Old Testament was adopted as in any way authoritative. That did not take place until after 621 B.C., when the words of prophets, lawgivers, and psalmists began to be collected and used for satisfying the needs of a religious community. A process of selection was carried on almost unconsciously, and as time went on the community itself came to add to the collection literature which it had itself produced. The ruling idea throughout was the preservation of religion in and through the community by

means of the sacred books. A very special sanctity was attached to them so that they might remain unaltered as time went on ; and traces of this sanctity are still to be found in some modern theories of the letter of Scripture.

The Old Testament is generally divided into three main sections : (1) The Law, comprising the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. (2) The Prophets, comprising the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve. (3) The Hagiographa, or writings, comprising the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

The Law

The books of the Law, commonly called the Pentateuch, or five rolls, purport to give, first, a history of mankind, and then of the descendants of Abraham down to the time of Moses. Incorporated in this history are various codes of law given as Laws of Moses. The books themselves are spoken of as the books of Moses, though, according to Hebrew usage, this need not mean written by Moses, but about Moses. In these books there is clear evidence of the fact that the narrative is a compilation from previously existing sources, and some of these sources are included in the Pentateuch as they stand, *e.g.*, the song

of Lamech, the song of Miriam, the song of Balaam, and the blessing of Moses. Other writings, like "the book of Jasher" and "the book of the Wars of the Lord," are referred to by name. The first attempt at a literary analysis of the Pentateuch was made by a French physician, Jean Astruc, in 1753. Confining himself to the book of Genesis, he tried to prove that it was compiled mainly from two documents distinguished by their use of different names for God. The name in the one case was Elohim, and in the other Jahweh, or Yahweh. This distinction proved to be the key to the problem. Other scholars took it up, with the result that the whole matter was found to be more complex and far-reaching than Astruc ever imagined. The documents which he detected in Genesis were shown to run through the whole Pentateuch. It was found also that there were, not one, but two documents that used the name Elohim (Elohists). One of these was closely allied in style and spirit to the Yahwist writer, while the other was more formal and ecclesiastical and much less human in tone. This latter came to be called P., or the Priestly document. The book of Deuteronomy, which stands by itself, was recognised to constitute a fourth main document, representing a peculiar type of legislation. It is now generally agreed that the Pentateuch is composed of the four main documents, J., E., D., and P. Each

of these is itself a compilation in which earlier writings have been used, and the process of welding the four into a single narrative was a long and intricate one. Several revisers had a hand in it, and most of them have left traces of their work.

It must not be supposed, however, that Pentateuch criticism has had to rely solely on literary analysis of this kind. The evidence for composite authorship and for the use of earlier documents is scattered all over the books, and can easily be recognised by any careful reader. For example, many of the stories told in the book of Genesis are duplicates. There are two accounts of creation, which have not been harmonised; there are double explanations of the origin of the names Israel, Bethel, and Beersheba, and different lists of the names of Esau's wives. When we come to compare the Deuteronomic and Levitical codes we find that they present certain irreconcilable differences. In the treatment of tithe and in the regulations for priests and levites there are not only discrepancies, but clear indications of differences in time and point of view. The facts are only compatible with the assumption of quite distinct strata of legislation, set side by side, without any very skilful attempt to reconcile them. As might be expected, these differences in the sources are marked by very great differences in the style in which the documents are written.

The argument from style is not perhaps always a very sound one, but when changes in style and vocabulary occur along with other changes they cannot be ignored. In the Pentateuch such changes are very marked. In some documents the style is vivid, easy, and natural ; in others it is stiff and formal to a degree. Such differences, taken along with others, point without doubt to differences in the sources.

As to the dates at which the main documents of the Pentateuch were composed there is now a fair measure of agreement among scholars. The two earliest, J. and E., belong to the period of the early monarchy, the former being composed in the southern kingdom about 900 B.C. and the latter in the northern kingdom about 750 B.C. D. was published in connection with the reform under Josiah in 621 B.C. In all probability it was composed somewhat earlier, the time often assigned to it being that of the persecutions under Manasseh. P. is the latest of the documents, and was promulgated under Ezra in the year 444 B.C., having been composed more probably about 500 B.C. As we have already seen, however, in all of these writings many earlier writings are embodied. Each of them shows traces of several revisions, and they have grown up by a process of edition and agglomeration. " The ultimate origins of the Pentateuch are oral—songs that were recited before they were written down, stories of

the past that had been long told with characteristic differences in different localities before they were welded into a fixed oral cycle, and later into literary form, laws that had been formulated, but were at first handed down orally from generation to generation of priests at the several sanctuaries. These oral origins belong to the eighth and ninth and many earlier centuries ; and even as late as the seventh century or later still, D and P may have drawn afresh from fixed oral tradition laws that had not previously been written." [1]

At first sight the picture presented by this critical examination of the Pentateuch is a very disconcerting one. Those who have been accustomed to regard Moses as the author of these books, and who have accepted them as literally and verbally inspired, find it very hard to adjust themselves to the new point of view. They cannot escape from the feeling that if these books are to be to them and to the world the vehicle of the Word of God in any special sense, then they should be removed from the vicissitudes to which secular literature is subject, and should have their authenticity and authority guaranteed in some quite unmistakable way. For those who have been trained in the traditions of Protestant Christianity this is a very natural position and

[1] " A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament," by G. B. Gray, p. 49.

one that should be treated with every sympathy. But it cannot be denied that it raises some very serious problems, and that, if it is pressed, it makes belief in the Bible a matter of extreme difficulty for many. The Bible makes no such claims for itself as those which are advanced on its behalf in the name of faith. As we have already suggested, the story of its origin is written in its own pages for those to read who can read between the lines. The greater, therefore, our reverence for it, the greater should be our willingness to listen to what it has to say of itself, and on that testimony to build our theories concerning it. The real advantage of the critical view of the Old Testament is the fact that it is a genuine aid to faith. The traditional theory leaves us with a mass of contradictions. In order to reconcile them we are driven to evasions and explanations of the most unworthy kind. But once make it clear that we have before us, not a single narrative set forth at the Divine dictation, but a story which has grown up by slow degrees out of a number of different documents reflecting very different stages in the religious development of the people, and the discrepancies are at once explained and the difficulties begin to vanish.

Further, it should be remembered that the religious value of the Old Testament does not lie in the importance or accuracy of the facts detailed so much as in the spiritual lessons conveyed by

them. To obtain a true view of these ancient writings we must learn to see them in perspective and to relate them to the religious life and witness of the people from whose midst they come. The various stages in Hebrew legislation, for example, contributed each in its way to the task of segregating that people for its peculiar work in the world, and were so far justified. So the stories of the patriarchs had their function to fulfil in keeping alive the belief in the Divine mission of Israel in the world, and in intensifying the zeal of the people in the service of their God. As they were written from the heart, so they appealed to the hearts of men. And that appeal holds good to-day. In these stories coming to us out of the ancient world, in their faith, insight, and deep spiritual experience, we can find that which speaks to us in a language we can understand. The literary and historical form in which the stories are cast, the almost childish naivety of some of their ideas, do not really affect the essence of their message.

It should be remembered also that just as the revelation of God came to and through the people of Israel, so the people had a large share in its transmission. To some the fact that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch may bring a very real sense of loss. But when we remember that the authors of the Pentateuch are not one, but many, that God spake of old in divers portions

and in divers manners, and that there were always those who were ready to hear and transmit His Word, we may well feel that we gain rather than lose by the exchange. There is nothing in the newer view of the Old Testament which forbids us to find in it a word of God to mankind. To recognise that the Word has come through human channels, and to be able to distinguish the message from the vehicle in which it was conveyed, is only to enhance our appreciation of it and to make it more intelligible to ourselves and to our own day. It is true here, as it is so often, that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not of ourselves."

The Histories

Turning now to the historical books of the Old Testament, we find that the same phenomena meet us as those which we have found in the Pentateuch. The book of Joshua is really but a continuation of the Pentateuch, the same documents being found in it as are found there. Indeed, these first six books are now generally described under the title the Hexateuch,[1] and what has been said of the first five of them holds good also for the sixth. The book of Judges comprises a number of stories, some of which are among the

[1] Pentateuch = the five rolls, Hexateuch = the six rolls.

most ancient in the Old Testament, illustrating in a very vivid way the settlement of the people of Israel in their adopted country. Most of these stories are themselves composite. They have grown up by accretion and alteration as they were handed down. The editor who collected them and made them into a book has put them into a framework of his own based on a very definite theory of history. Most of them are made to fit in to a cycle of events as follows. Under the influence of their new surroundings the Israelites tended constantly to forsake the worship of Yahweh. For this they were delivered into the hands of oppressors, who reduced them to a fit state of penitence, and then Yahweh raised up a judge to deliver them. Such a reading of history was not uncommon in the ancient world, and there is nothing at all illegitimate about it. The standpoint of the Old Testament writers is first and foremost religious. They are concerned with the lessons to be learned through the history of the past rather than with the history itself. They were writing with the very definite object of keeping their people true to the service of Yahweh, and they had no scruple in making use of the experience of the past in order to do so. It is for us, therefore, not to criticise them for failing to do what they never professed to do, but rather to use their work for religious ends such as they contemplated.

The books of Samuel present features very

similar to those of Judges. The narrative covers the period of the establishment of the Hebrew monarchy, and deals mainly with the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David. Samuel himself is regarded as the last of the judges, and the book marks the transition to a more ordered and stable government. The books as a whole were obviously written at a time much later than the events which they describe. The author, for example, refers to the time of David as already long past. At the same time there is no doubt that the author has had access to many earlier sources, and that some of these have been embodied in his work. There are clearly marked duplicate narratives of the choice of Saul to be king, and of the call of David and of his introduction to Saul. These indicate that the narrative, as we have it, is based on a combination of two earlier records giving an account of the same events regarded from different standpoints. It is impossible to speak with any certainty as to the date at which the books of Samuel were written. They cannot have had Samuel himself for their author, for, as has been said, they describe events long after his day, and there are indications that the compiler looks back at the time of which he is writing after a considerable lapse of years (*cf.* "Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day").[1] At the same time it is probable

[1] 1 Sam. xxvii. 6.

that the books embody contemporary narratives of some of the events recorded. The existence of duplicates and the disorder in arrangement show very clearly that the writer was working on older material. Critics have distinguished in these books two groups of sources, one of which may be as early as 800 B.C., or even earlier, and the other as late as, or later than, 740 B.C. The compilation of the books as a whole would need to be placed at some date later than either of these.

The books of Kings, like those of Samuel, were originally one undivided work. They give a history of the Hebrew monarchy from the accession of Solomon to its end in the year 586 B.C. The story is written from the prophetic standpoint, and incorporates certain prophetic narratives. Its atmosphere, generally speaking, is Deuteronomic, as is seen from the condemnation of those kings who failed to centralise the worship in Jerusalem. Like all Jewish writers of history, the compiler of these books incorporated his sources with little or no modification, and fitted them into a framework of his own, consisting of the king's age at accession, the length of his reign, and a judgment on his character. While the sources come no doubt from various periods, they are all earlier than the date of the composition of the books. The date of the framework may be as early as 621 B.C., though the books as a

whole probably did not take their present form till after the fall of the Jewish kingdom in 586 B.C.

In the books of Chronicles we have the history of the chosen people rewritten from the standpoint of a Jew living in the period from 300—200 B.C. They are invaluable as a reflexion of the leading ideas of that period, and as an example of the way in which history can be treated. The writer's interest centres almost exclusively in Judah and in the house of Levi. He treats at length of the Temple and its sacred workers—priests, levites, and singers. The religious and ecclesiastical standpoint of the work is most marked throughout. The history is based on Samuel and Kings, which are largely reproduced, with some striking omissions and alterations. Nothing is said, for example, of the development of the northern kingdom, and there is no mention of the stories of Elijah and Elisha, while the life of David is rewritten from the general standpoint of the compiler. His wars, his moral failings, and his struggles against intrigue are toned down or omitted, and David himself becomes a typically pious king devoted to the religious advancement of his people. In addition to his canonical sources the writer appears to have used another historical source which is responsible for some slight additions to the narratives of Samuel and Kings. A careful comparison between these books and Chronicles supplies material in abun-

dance for understanding the methods of a Jewish historical writer, and is full of instruction. It is a serious mistake to regard such books as history in the strict sense of the term. They are really religious or ecclesiastical tracts, and use the history of the past for their special purpose—a perfectly legitimate proceeding in the eyes of the writer, and legitimate to us also if we make allowance for his standpoint and aims.

The Prophets

The prophetic books of the Old Testament have certain features in common, due to similarity in the conditions under which they were produced. Generally speaking they consist of collections of oracles or sayings of the prophet whose name they bear. These collections are mostly the work of a compiler or compilers. They are put together without any particular order, and in most cases material from other prophets is embodied with them and is not given any distinctive mark or title. The oracles are sometimes poetry and sometimes prose, and are occasionally interspersed with short historical narratives bearing on the life or experience of the prophet. The books are thus composite in origin, and have generally been subject to more than one revision. All this makes it very difficult for " him who runs " to read them, and yet some knowledge of the facts of their

composition, their date, and historical setting is absolutely necessary to their proper understanding. We have already said something of the witness and teaching of the prophets ; what remains now is to describe, very briefly, the literary structure of their books.

We begin with the book of Isaiah, which is perhaps, of all the prophets, the best known to English readers. Most people are now familiar with the fact that the book as it stands is in no sense the work of Isaiah himself, and that a large section of it (chs. xl.—lxvi.) belong to a much later date than the time of Isaiah. For convenience this part of the book is generally known as the second Isaiah. But the whole work offers clear indications of a much more composite origin. The use of certain titles and other features point to the following divisions[1] :—

" (*a*) i. 2—31 : Prophecies preceded by a general title (i. 1), ascribing authorship to Isaiah.

" (*b*) ii.—xii. : Prophecies mainly concerning Judah and Jerusalem, ascribed in a title (ii. 2) to Isaiah.

" (*c*) xiii.—xxiii. : ' Oracles,' which the title to the first section (xiii. 1) probably intends to ascribe to Isaiah, but which certainly contains some prophecies written as late as the Exile (*e.g.*, ch. xiii. and xxi. 1—10).

[1] From Dr. Gray's " Critical Introduction to the Old Testament," p. 181.

" (*d*) xxiv.—xxvii. : Anonymous prophecy (post-exilic).

" (*e*) xxviii.—xxxiii. : A group of prophetic poems beginning with the interjection Ah ! (R.V. Woe ! or Ho !).

" (*f*) xxxiv.—xxxv. : Anonymous prophecy (exilic or post-exilic).

" (*g*) xxxvi.—xxxix. : Mainly extracts referring to Isaiah from 2 Kings.

" (*h*) xl.—lxvi. : Anonymous prophecy."

The sections ascribed to Isaiah himself cover a period from about 738 to 701 B.C. There is no attempt to keep them in chronological order, and it is only in connection with some of them that the historical situation can be clearly diagnosed.

Chs. xl.—lv. are now generally assigned to a period between 549 and 538 B.C. They are addressed to the Jews in exile, and are intended to rouse them from their lethargy and to fill them with a sense of their mission as the Servant of Yahweh, whose function it is to instruct the world concerning the true God and His Will.

Chs. lvi.—lxvi. are also post-exilic, but are clearly distinguished from the foregoing. They form a collection of prophecies by different hands. They have no one ruling purpose, but deal with a number of topics and suggest a different situation from that of the other sections of the book. Many of them may be dated about the middle of the fifth century. The book of Isaiah as a whole

probably did not attain its present form till about the third century B.C. It is thus the result of a long period of growth.

The book of Jeremiah, in its external features, bears some resemblance to the first part of the book of Isaiah. It consists of a number of prophecies attributed to Jeremiah, with certain biographical and historical passages, and at least one extract from 2 Kings, viz., ch. lii. The allusions to contemporary events are not clear, and the book presents many chronological and exegetical puzzles. The general history of the book is admirably summarised by Dr. Gray as follows[1]: "The prophet's teaching for the previous twenty-three years, already in part expressed in poems, was summarised in a book which also contained some autobiographical matter: this book was written in 604 and perished: it was rewritten and expanded in 603. Between 603 and 586 or later Jeremiah continued to teach, still recording his teaching in his poems, and, probably, whether we care to cite xxx. 2 in evidence or not, from time to time committing these to writing. But especially during this period he had gathered round him disciples, some of whom are most likely the authors of the main body of the biographical portions of Jeremiah (in chs. xxvi.—xlv.). Both the books of prophecies prepared by Jeremiah and of biographies by his disciples

[1] "Critical Introduction to the Old Testament," p. 196

suffered interpolation and rearrangement either before or after, or both before and after, they were brought together into a single book. This collection of material has reached us in two forms —the Hebrew and the Greek—which are differently arranged and differ in extent. One or other of these forms may have continued open to accretion and interpolation till well into the second century B.C." Many of the biographical passages in the book are probably due to the scribe Baruch, though it is evident that he was not the compiler of the whole book. This was the work of a later hand, and its aim was largely biographical.

The book of Ezekiel has been described as one of the fixed points of Old Testament criticism. It is the work of the man whose name it bears, a priest who was carried into captivity in the year 597 B.C. In Babylon he predicted and accounted for the pending fall of Jerusalem, and, when that event had taken place, drew up a constitution for the restored community whose life was to centre round the new Temple of Yahweh. The book falls into the following four divisions :—(1) Chs. i. —xxiv. : Oracles of doom before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (2) Chs. xxv.—xxxii. : Oracles against the nations. (3) Chs. xxxiii.—xxxix. : Prophecies of restoration delivered after the fall of Jerusalem. (4) Chs. xl.—xlviii. : Ordinances and regulations for the restored Israel. There is a good deal of originality about Ezekiel's

thought, and the book bears the stamp of his personality. He is not uninfluenced by the surroundings and imagery of Babylonian religion, but he uses his material freely, and his work owes as much to himself as to his sources.

"The Twelve" is the name given to the last collection of Hebrew prophetic literature. It consists of a number of miscellaneous prophecies under twelve different names and belonging to widely different periods. The collection opens with writings ascribed to six prophets of the eighth century, viz., Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah; then come three belonging to the seventh century, viz., Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah; then two who prophesied in the sixth century, viz., Haggai and Zechariah; and finally a fifth century prophet, Malachi. The actual dates of the books, however, do not correspond with those of the men whose names they bear. The only ones written in the eighth century are Amos, Hosea, and Micah. Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Nahum belong to the seventh century; Haggai and part of Zechariah to the sixth; Malachi and Obadiah probably to the fifth; while Joel, Jonah, and Zechariah (ix.—xiv.) are to be ascribed to the post-exilic period. Like other books of the Old Testament, the minor prophets have all been edited, and some of them have passed through the hands of more than one editor. Interpolations are not infrequent. De-

tails on these points are to be found in the individual commentaries. On the whole the pre-exilic prophecies deal mainly with judgment, while the post-exilic are concerned with promise and restoration. They should all be studied in close relation to the history of the times from which they spring.

The Sacred Writings

The Psalter has been described as the song-book of the second Temple. It is a collection of poems and songs brought together gradually and covering a long period of time. In its present form it was completed about the year 100 B.C., but behind and within it are to be distinguished a number of earlier compilations. The problem of sifting and dating these collections is a very complex one, and does not carry us far in the direction of determining the origin of any individual psalm. The following stages in the process may, however, be distinguished with some degree of certainty [1] :—

1. The compilation of a book entitled "Of David," comprising Pss. iii.—xli., except xxxiii., probably about the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

2. The compilation of a second book "Of David" (Pss. l.—lxxii.), with exceptions, in the fourth century.

[1] *Cf.* Dr. Gray's "Introduction," pp. 132 *et seq.*

3. The compilation of a book entitled "Of Asaph," *i.e.*, belonging to a guild of singers of that name (*cf.* Ezra ii. 41). This comprises Pss. l., lxxiii. and lxxxiii., and may be dated between 430 and 330 B.C.

4. The compilation of a book entitled "Of the Sons of Korah" (probably another guild of singers: *cf.* 2 Chron. xx. 19) and also to be dated between 430 and 330 B.C.

5. The compilation of an Elohist psalter from psalms derived from other compilations by an editor who substituted the name Elohim for Yahweh (*cf.* Pss. xlii.—lxxxiii.). The date of this is probably the third century B.C.

6. Enlargement of this somewhat later by the addition of Pss. lxxxiv.—lxxxix.

7. Compilation about the same time of a book entitled "Songs of the Ascents."

The Psalter as a whole was not completed till about 100 B.C. These dates, however, though they show that the psalms belong mainly to the post-exilic period, do not exclude the possibility that many of them have come down from earlier times. Some of them may even have been due to David himself, though there is no conclusive evidence in favour of attributing to him any individual psalm. All have been freely edited, and often shaped to suit the needs of the time at which the collections were made. The national note in them has been made very prominent, and

they mainly reflect the religious life and needs of the post-exilic period.

The book of Proverbs belongs to what is called the wisdom literature of the Hebrews. Parallels to it are to be found in the apocryphal books of Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon. It consists of strings of pithy sayings, some of which are altogether detached while others are devoted to special subjects. They are a good illustration of the form of Hebrew writing known as parallelism. Most of them are ascribed to Solomon, others to the unknown names of Agur and Lemuel. These names are merely titles given to the collections, and must not be taken to imply authorship. That Solomon wrote proverbs, and had a reputation for that kind of wisdom, is probable enough. Some of his sayings are, no doubt, embodied in the book, but the whole was formed gradually and covers a long period. It was certainly not until after the exile that it reached its present form.

The book of Job is a great dramatic poem based on the ancient tradition of the trials and sufferings of the patriarch of that name. It is a theodicy, or an attempt to justify the ways of God to man. In form and language it is one of the finest literary monuments of antiquity. At the same time it is not a literary whole, the speeches of Elihu and the poem on wisdom in ch. xxviii. being later additions. Scholars are now generally agreed that the Elihu

speeches were inserted in order to correct and supplement the teaching of Job's friends in accordance with later and possibly more orthodox ideas. The date of the book can hardly be earlier than the exilic or post-exilic period. Its theology, in the main, belongs to that time, and its discussion of the problem of suffering implies a long experience of trial, national as well as individual. While the framework or setting of the book belongs to the patriarchal age, its thought and teaching belong to the much later day when it was written.

The Song of Songs is the first of five *Megilloth*, or rolls, *i.e.*, books, read at certain Jewish feasts in the synagogues. It was read at the Passover ; Ruth at Pentecost ; Lamentations on the day of the destruction of Jerusalem (the 9th Ab) ; Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Booths, and Esther at the Feast of Purim. The Song is a love poem, a drama with lyrical interludes, and an exquisite specimen of its kind. Though it is pieced together so as to form a consistent whole, it is probably based on a collection of wedding songs such as were common in the folk poetry of the Hebrews. It probably owes its place in the canon to the allegorical interpretations placed upon it. Its date is very uncertain. The purity of the style in which it is written would seem to point to an early origin, but other indications suggest with greater probability a post-exilic date.

Lamentations is a book of poems (dirges and

prayers) based on the fall of Jerusalem and the sufferings of the people of Yahweh. The dirges are in acrostic form and probably belong to different periods. Ancient tradition ascribed them to Jeremiah, and this may be correct as far as the first of them is concerned. But the language and standpoint of the rest of the book point to a later date. Most scholars, however, are now agreed that chs. ii. and iv. are the work of a man who had experienced the siege of Jerusalem in 588—586 B.C. They would be written later than this date, and the whole collection is probably later still.

The story of Ruth is an idyll of the time of the Judges and may be regarded as a kind of appendix to the books of Samuel. It supplies what was regarded as a deficiency in these books by giving an account of the ancestry of David. Incidentally also it seems to justify mixed marriages for Jews, though whether that was its definite purpose may be doubted. The date of the book cannot be earlier than the seventh century B.C. and may be much later. The style is very like that of the best parts of the books of Samuel, and would seem to point to the earlier date.

The book of Esther tells the story of a Jewess in the Persian capital Susa who became queen of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) and was able to rescue her fellow-countrymen from the destruction prepared for them by the king's courtier Haman. The aim

of the book is to account for the Feast of Purim and to give grounds for its observance. The book was evidently written some time after the events it relates(485—465 B.C.), and is generally assigned to some time in the third century. It cannot be regarded as historical in all its details, though it is probably based on facts. It exhibits a spirit of fierce Jewish nationalism which greatly commended it to Jews, but lays it open to serious criticism from Christians.

Ecclesiastes, or Koheleth, belongs to the wisdom literature. It is ascribed to Solomon as preacher or teacher, and is a tractate or meditation partly in prose and partly in poetry on human life and activity in general. The writer is oppressed by the anomalies and mysteries of man's lot, and, though he is no pessimist in the modern sense of the term, he lacks that strong faith and lively hope in God which animate most of the writers of the Old Testament. It is generally thought that the inconsistencies which the teaching of the book reveals are due to the fact that it has been interpolated in places by writers who wished to soften down the harshness and gloominess of the original author's position. The book was probably written between 400 and 200 B.C., but its date cannot be determined with any accuracy.

The traditional theory concerning the book of Daniel was that it is the work of a Jewish captive

written in Babylon in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. But this theory has now been almost universally abandoned. The book belongs to the apocalyptic literature of the Jews. It was written with a very definite purpose and at a time which can be determined. Its aim is to encourage the people to resist attempts which were being made to seduce them from fidelity to their religion. It does so, first, by recounting the story of Daniel's faithfulness in the time of the Babylonian captivity, and secondly by a series of visions in which the overthrow of the kingdom of the persecutors and the establishment of the everlasting Kingdom of God are predicted. Arguments derived both from the internal and external criticism of the book go to show that the circumstances it has in view are those of the persecutions under Antiochus Epiphanes (175—164 B.C.). The book was obviously written in the latter part of his reign and after the Maccabean revolt had been begun. This would make its date almost certainly early in the year 165. The work is historical in the sense that it deals with a definite historical situation. The writer uses the ancient traditions of Daniel and his doings in Babylon for his own purposes, but how far they represent history it is impossible to say.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are really one book and are so given in the Hebrew MSS. They form the conclusion of the books

of Chronicles, and originally may have been part of that work. They are concerned with the Temple and its ordinances, and their record covers a period of about 100 years, viz., 537—433 B.C. It is based on memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, which have a considerable autobiographical value and were composed not very long after the events to which they refer. But the books themselves were not compiled till about 300 B.C., and show the same signs of composite authorship as are found in many other books of the Old Testament. Beside the autobiographical passages, there are sections written by the chronicler himself, some in Hebrew and some in Aramaic, along with what purport to be original official decrees and documents in the two languages. Some of these documents may be genuine, and probably all of them are at least paraphrases and translations by the chronicler of Persian records.

CHAPTER V

THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE student of the New Testament can never be satisfied with the merely literary and critical study of the books of which it is composed. Valuable and interesting as such study is, it is only a means towards an end, viz., the discovery of the message of these books, of that for which they stand in the religious literature of the world. When we begin to investigate this message we find at once that it has deep roots in the past. The New Testament or covenant presupposes an Old one, and the Old conditions both the time and mode of the presentation of the New. Jesus came in the fulness of the times, and He came, not to destroy, but to fulfil. His teaching and witness, while in every sense His own and original, were also conditioned by the mental and spiritual capacities of those to whom He spake. Hence the varieties in the development of Christian truth, due to varieties in soil or environment, whether Palestinian Judaism or Judaism of the Dispersion or the varied paganism of the Græco-Roman world.

All these influences may be traced both in the New Testament and in later Christian literature. The gospel came into a world that was both prepared for it and exceedingly unready to receive it, and both facts deeply affected its presentation. So to us the message of the New Testament is filtered through the mental and religious experiences of the men whose work it was to place it on record, and we are always faced with the difficulty of distinguishing between the facts and the personal equation. It must be confessed that the evangelists form rather an opaque medium through which to discern the wonder and glory of the revelation in Jesus Christ. They did not always understand Him, and the resources of their language only sufficed to give a very feeble rendering of His teaching and work. But the very frankness of their misunderstanding is in their favour, and it is one of the miracles of history that they should have succeeded as they did.

The Synoptic Portrait

It was a true instinct which set the synoptic portraiture of Jesus in the forefront of the New Testament. Though the books recording it are not the earliest in time, everything else in the New Testament runs back into the story which they tell. The Christian religion finds its centre, not in doctrines or systems, but in a Person. It is

with the Person of its Founder Jesus Christ that the exponents of Christianity have first to do.

The synoptic narrative does not give us a biography of Jesus Christ, and, at first sight, it seems to provide a very slender foundation for the mighty superstructure which was built upon it. This, however, is only an additional testimony to the greatness of the experience which underlies the story. The writers themselves are content to give a series of sketches illustrating the work and teaching and character of Jesus, and the historical framework in which these are placed is of the slightest. Nevertheless, from this scanty material it is possible to gather an unmistakeable impression of the personality of our Lord as something unique in its simplicity, depth, and power. The writers have no hesitation about representing Him as fully and broadly human. Though they describe the inauguration of His life-work in terms of current Messianic expectation, and take for granted so much in His relation to the forerunner John the Baptist that it is very difficult for us to form an adequate conception of it, they do not let their lofty interpretation of His mission interfere with their simple and beautiful presentation of His human life. He is born and cradled in poverty and is trained in the traditional faith of His people like any youth of His day. He works with His hands as a carpenter, and when He comes forth to teach in the name of God He has no

credentials beyond the truth of His words and the persuasiveness of His speech. As with other religious reformers, the consciousness of His mission is not attained to without strain and agony of mind. The story of the Temptation is most significant in this regard, and makes it possible to understand, not only the mission of Jesus, but the spirit in which He faced it. Like every great soul, He was confronted with the alternative of doing His work in the world's way or in God's, and He made His choice once for all. So His lot lay with humble folk, and He gave Himself to their service. He knew what it was to toil and to be hungry. He shared the simple joys of simple people, and He wept with those that wept. He knew, too, the contradiction of sinners, and He carried out His task amid scorn and hatred and misunderstanding, He had nothing of what the world calls success, and He died apparently forsaken of God and man. All this the story sets forth in the simplest and most artless fashion. And yet there is about it a real sense of wonder and mystery. Man though Jesus was, yet never man spake as He did. There was a self-evident authority about His words that made a deep impression and lasted long after He ceased to speak on earth. Though His teaching cut clean across the cherished traditions of His hearers, it came with such convincing power that they could not gainsay it, and it was cast generally in such a form that the simplest could

understand. And His deeds correspond with His words. Acts of help and healing flowed forth from Him in sheer pity for human need. He had compassion on the multitudes who were as sheep without a shepherd. His own account of His mission was that He had come into the world to serve men, to seek and to save them that were lost. He had a special regard for little children, and the feeling for them exhibited in the Gospels is something quite unique in ancient literature. He counted them as very precious in God's sight, and as very near to Him, and even in adults the child-like spirit was the necessary passport to the Kingdom. In all this we see the source of the new valuation which Jesus put on humanity. Those whom the world counted as outcasts were His special care. Men and women were all alike children of the heavenly Father and so equally precious in His sight. He brought new hope to sinners and pariahs because He believed them to be capable of better things. He would not "break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax."

The Miracles

This is not the place for any detailed discussion of the New Testament miracles. The time is long gone by when we could say that miracles do not happen, and the subject is one on which wise people will be very careful to keep an open mind.

Each story of the miraculous has to be judged on its merits, and, making allowance for the temper of the times, it may well be that some of the miracle stories, especially those of the nature miracles, are only unconscious exaggerations of remarkable natural events. But when all has been said, the fact remains that the miraculous element is deeply embedded in the earliest narratives of the life of our Lord and could not be eliminated without tearing the whole story to pieces. To suppose that the miraculous is a late legendary addition to an otherwise normal human record is to fly in the face of all the available evidence. Most of the miracles, too, are so entirely congruous with the whole Gospel presentation of the Person of Jesus that one reads of them without any shock of surprise and incredulity. They are part of a picture which must be received or rejected as a whole. The best way to approach them is to recognise that in Jesus Christ we have an entirely unique Personality whose impact upon His day and generation was sure to produce unusual and abnormal results. We do not know enough of the relations between mind and matter to enable us to account for them ; but we do know enough to make us very cautious of putting any hard-and-fast limits to what is possible in this direction. We understand better than we once did that " there are many things in heaven and earth not dreamt of in our philosophy." We can no longer use the

miracles as proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ. But on the facts before us we are bound so to interpret the Person of Jesus as to make it at least probable that He would act as other men do not, and that He would show Himself possessed of more than human powers. Our belief in Him, therefore, as Son of God and Lord and Saviour of men is not dependent on the acceptance of any one of the miracles connected with His Person. It is because we so believe on other grounds, that we can find in the miracles not a rock of offence, but a manifestation of His Glory. For it must never be forgotten that the supreme marvel of Christianity is the Person of Jesus Christ. The more we know of Him and the more deeply we enter into fellowship with Him the less difficulty do we find with the minor wonders of His life and work on earth. They fall easily into their place.

The synoptic writers witness to the uniqueness of the Personality of Jesus in at least two ways. They portray Him as morally sinless, and as possessing a special consciousness of God. As to the former, they are not concerned to frame any doctrine of His sinlessness, nor do they build any arguments upon it. Their witness to the fact is unconscious and therefore all the more striking. While they show that in the teaching of Jesus there is a keen consciousness and strong hatred of human sin, there is no trace in the Gospels of any confession of sin or penitence for sin on the

part of Jesus Himself. In this respect at least He occupies a position widely differing from that of all the great saints of history, whose sense of sin has generally been deep in proportion to their sanctity. At the same time the evangelists make it quite clear that Jesus regarded Himself as liable to temptation, and that He had to attain His goal through suffering and with strong crying and tears. His sinlessness was no mere moral impassivity, not the ignorant innocence of a child, but that of one who had been able to keep Himself unspotted from the world, to say in the hour of temptation, "Get thee behind me, Satan," and to confess "the Prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." It is because "He was tempted like as we are, yet without sin," that He is able for all time "to succour them that are tempted."

So, again, the picture drawn of the God consciousness of Jesus is altogether unique. He was Son of God not in any official or metaphysical sense, but because He knew, loved, trusted, and obeyed the heavenly Father as men do not and cannot. His teaching about God betrays a certainty and an intimacy that are quite unusual. He claims not only to know Him, but to be able to reveal Him. It is in order to do His Father's will that He has come into the world, and in the aim and fulfilment of His mission He and His Father are one. It is this perfect faith in God which gives to Jesus that

serenity of mind and mastery of circumstance that characterised His whole life.

The Teaching

Jesus showed Himself to men as a "Teacher sent from God." They recognised the fact, and at the same time acknowledged that, in this respect also, He was unique. "He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."[1] He did not make the usual appeal to the tradition of the elders. He knew what they had to say and respected it, but He spoke Himself in other terms and with a higher authorisation. "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time. . . . . But I say unto you."[2] So both the form and substance of His teaching were vivid, original, and at times even paradoxical. He spoke in parables and dealt with extremes, and though His teaching was no doubt conditioned by the creeds, circumstances, and expectations of the times, it contained and embodied principles that are easily discoverable and universal in their scope and application. His silence, too, is sometimes as significant as His speech. He knew the limited capacity of His hearers and dealt with them on the basis of the Johannine word, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."[3]

[1] St. Matt. vii. 29.
[2] St. Matt. v. 33.
[3] St. John xvi. 12.

The New Testament Message

Throughout the Synoptic Gospels the teaching of Jesus is regulated by His conception of the Kingdom of God. Recent inquiry into the eschatology of Jesus has made it more possible to interpret His teaching as to the Kingdom, but it has not shut us up, as some suppose, to an interpretation of the Kingdom that is purely future and transcendent. One must give full weight to the apocalyptic elements in the teaching and to its consonance with many of the ideas of contemporary Judaism. But when that has been done there remains in our Lord's view of the Kingdom something that is entirely His own. It is something more than a moral and religious ideal, a " dim far-off event." Though it belongs to the supernatural world, it is a present and available reality, whose advent and consummation, however, depend on the faith and receptivity of men. It is the work of God, but conditioned by the faith of men, immanent yet transcendent, coming, yet always delayed. There are words of Jesus which seem to show that He regarded the coming of the Kingdom as a climax, the sudden inauguration of the Messianic age ; while there are others that suggest that the Kingdom is already present among men but undergoing a process of development.[1] The two conceptions are not necessarily incompatible. When Jesus spoke in parables about the mystery of the Kingdom He

[1] *Cf.* St. Mark iv. 26—29, and ix. 1.

was surely setting His followers an example that should warn them off hard-and-fast dogmatic statements. As Dr. Moffatt says, " When He declared ' the Kingdom of God is at hand,' He was not speaking out of apocalyptic calculation, but from His assurance that through Him God was about to exercise the sovereign sway of His good purpose. The avoidance of detailed calculations may have been due in part to His conviction that the end was imminent ; but they were superfluous, for a deeper reason. It was His belief in God's character which rendered detailed schemes and programmes for the future irrelevant, just as it convinced him that the Kingdom, with its apparently unpromising beginning in the present, was sure of a glorious consummation." [1]

For to-day, however, the interest and value of the doctrine of the Kingdom lie in its bearing on Christian life and morals. It does not, as is sometimes said, reduce Christian teaching to an " interim ethic," available and pertinent only for the brief period of waiting for the end. It rather reveals it as an ideal ethic to be attained in its fulness only when the Kingdom comes, but to be striven after here and now. The very effort to attain it is to be reckoned among the best means of establishing the Kingdom here on earth.

There has been much discussion as to the originality of the ethical teaching of Jesus. No

[1] " The Theology of the Gospels," pp. 54—5.

doubt it is true that many of His sayings can be paralleled in the Talmud and elsewhere, but it is not on the letter of the precepts that the real worth of His teaching depends. He came, not to lay down the law, but to inculcate a spirit, and the commands He gave were not binding regulations so much as examples of the working out of the new life in and through Him. For this reason He laid more stress on the inward motive than on overt acts. His ideal is in sharp contrast to that of the ancient world, which exalted the high-souled and self-sufficient man and laid stress on the ruder virtues of courage, self-assertion, proper pride, and the like. The ethics of Jesus, on the other hand, are more social; a man's worth depends not on what he is by himself and for his own sake, but on his relations to God on the one hand and to his fellow-men on the other. Hence the stress on meekness, self-denial, obedience, and service, for the last shall be first and the first last in the Kingdom. Thus it is not only high achievement, but the will to do and the desire to be, that win the blessing. Humility in the presence of God and willing abandonment of self in the higher service of one's fellows are required of all followers of Jesus. The ideal thus set forth assumed that men and women were capable of the very best. As sons of the heavenly Father they shared His nature and were able to fulfil His expectations. However marred and spoiled the Divine image within

them, it was never entirely obliterated. They were lost, but they might be found; and the new hope for human nature which this interpretation of it involved was an integral part of the gospel of Jesus. But it had its other side in a marked intensification and spiritualising of the sense of sin. Sin became a far more heinous and terrible thing when it was regarded not merely as rebellion against a king or breach of a Divine law, but as doing despite to an everlasting love. It was this deepened consciousness of sin, with its entail of misery and despair, which brought Jesus into the world to seek and to save the lost. He came to reinforce the spiritual nature of men and so to do for them what they could not do for themselves. Thus the effectiveness of His moral teaching is due to the fact that it is not merely "the law of a carnal commandment, but the power of an endless life."

His Work

This brings us to the question as to the chief purpose of Christ's coming into the world. As has already been suggested, this was not merely to teach men or to set before them a new ideal, or to inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom, but to seek and to save the lost. The synoptic writings make it quite clear that Jesus regarded His work as a work of redemption, and that, as time went on, He realised that it could only be accomplished by the

world-old method of sacrifice. As we shall see later, this idea received marked emphasis and expansion in the preaching of the Church, but the roots of it in the Gospels are unmistakable. There we have clearly set forth the idea that Jesus would save His people from their sins. Quite apart from the more definite references to His saving work, His whole attitude to men is that of One who has power to help them in their needs and even deliver them from their sins. He has compassion on the multitudes, and He declares, to the horror of the orthodox of His day, "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." [1] The great passage in St. Matt. xi. 28—30, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," etc., only puts into words what is implied in many a story of Christ's dealing with the people. All that is said in the Gospels of His tenderness, pity, and sympathy with men and women would lose much of its meaning apart from His power to save.

It was not until the ministry of Jesus drew to a close that He began to make known to His disciples that His work would be accomplished only by suffering and death. Realising that He had come into the world "not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many," [2] He set His face to go to Jerusalem. In the revelation at Capernaum He

[1] St. Mark ii. 10. [2] St. Matt. xx. 28.

made known to His followers the fate that awaited Him there. It was perhaps natural that they should not understand Him, and that from that time forward they walked apart though treading the same road to Calvary. "He trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with Him."[1] If we may seek at all to penetrate the consciousness of Jesus during those last awful days, it would seem that He had before His mind the thought of the suffering servant in Isaiah and that He knew that He had a cup to drink and a discipline to undergo before He could accomplish His mission. Quite apart from any theological interpretations that have been put upon it, we may see in His passion and death a voluntary sacrifice on His part as being God's ordained means for the completion of that redemptive work which He had come into the world to do. It was a supreme task of love, necessitated not by any requirements of abstract justice, but by the dictates of His own heart, and by His knowledge of man's sore plight and bitter need. "Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the end."[2]

The Resurrection

But the Cross is not a mere unrelieved tragedy. The early Church unquestionably believed that

[1] Isaiah lxiii. 3.
[2] St. John xiii. 1.

if Christ died for our sins, He rose again for our justification. The grounds of this belief are to be found in the Gospel story and its sequel. The candid student of the New Testament will always find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that at the grave in the garden something happened, and that that something was sufficiently remarkable to deliver the disciples from the despair of the Cross and to send them out into the world with their faith in God renewed and with the music of a new song of hope and deliverance on their lips. Without a genuine belief in the resurrection on the part of the disciples it seems impossible to account for the early history or later progress of the Church. Such things do not grow from delusions or vague surmises. The same belief also is necessary to explain the Gospel story itself. On their own showing the writers failed often to understand or appreciate their Master. It was only when they came to look back on the story in the light of His resurrection that it took form and coherence in their hands, and that they obtained the insight which enabled them to tell it as they did. All this, however, while it may be good evidence for the belief which the disciples entertained, does not bring us much nearer the fact or facts underlying the belief. Here it must be said that recent investigation of the sources, and especially of the testimony of St. Paul, has served to increase our sense of the value of the historical basis for belief

in the resurrection. The difficulties in the way of any reasonable explanation of the facts apart from it are insuperable. We must remember, too, that the resurrection story stands or falls with our interpretation of the Person of Christ. If He was what the Gospels make Him out to be, then we may say with the disciples of old, He could not be holden of death.[1] On the manner of His rising it were better not to dogmatise. Enough to know that His life persists, and that when we seek Him we have to look, not back to the grave under the lone Syrian skies, but upward and around to a Power and a Person ever present with His Church, and ever living to make intercession for His own.

The Living Christ

The great difference between Jesus Christ and all other religious teachers and leaders is that His work as Saviour was not limited to His days on earth, and that He now exercises more than a posthumous influence. The phrase " the Living Christ " may not be a very suitable or intelligible one, but it expresses a truth to which the New Testament continually bears witness, and of which the Church has never quite lost sight. The early Christian communities believed that they had experience of the living presence of their Lord. Where two or three met together in His

[1] *Cf.* Acts ii. 24.

name, *i.e.*, for His aims, in His spirit, and in obedience to His will, there was He in the midst of them. From this conscious and abiding presence of the Master they derived their strength and hope and inspiration. In their experience the Power of the Name was much more than the influence of a memory, however vivid and precious. Unless we are to distrust entirely all the evidence of history, these experiences have been repeated in the Church of all ages. There has been a consciousness of communion with Jesus Christ that has rested on something deeper than memory or imagination. It has meant contact with a personal force the reality of which has been seen in its fruits, in changed lives, in passionate devotion, in eager and self-sacrificing service. This felt presence of the Lord has been none the less real because it was spiritual. Men and women have been with Jesus in the sense that they have thought His thoughts after Him, done His will, and identified themselves with His aims. Through such simple means they have found themselves in touch with His mighty personality, and the result has been on their part a new access of spiritual power and insight. The verification of this experience may be found in its widespread character and in the uniformity of its results. It has been a witness to the power of the personality of Jesus that cannot be controverted. "The life, the mind and the personality of Jesus

will not be understood till we have realised by some intimate experience something of the worth and beauty of the countless souls that in every century have found and still find in Him the alpha and omega of their being. For the Gospels are not four but ' ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands,' and the last word of every one of them is, ' Lo I am with you alway even unto the end of the world.' " [1]

This takes us no doubt beyond the period covered by the Synoptic Gospels. Their sequel is to be found in the Acts of the Apostles, in which the Spirit appears taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto men. The story of the infant Church there given is a very wonderful one, and the secret of it is to be found in the power of the risen and exalted Christ over His followers. In the witness which they bore to Him we have a most exalted doctrine of His Person. He came in the fulness of the times to save and sanctify His people. He is the Messiah, the sent and anointed of God, rejected by the people it is true, but all the same victorious over sin and death and exalted to the right hand of God. Gradually His people come to adjust themselves to the breadth of His teaching and mission and realise that it cannot be confined to Israel, but belongs to all mankind. And so the Church rises to the height of its great

[1] " The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire," by T. R. Glover, p. 140.

missionary vocation and begins the work of spreading the Gospel throughout the Gentile world, foreshadowing in their splendid faith the day when the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of God and of His Christ.

CHAPTER VI

THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (*contd.*)

The Witness of St. Paul

The chief agent in the expansion of Christianity was the great Apostle Paul. His letters form a large part of the New Testament and supply the earliest and most cogent testimony to the power of the risen Christ. In them no doubt there are many things hard to be understood, and the superficial reader is easily daunted by their crabbed and involved style and by the echoes of the forgotten controversies in which they abound. But if we will be content to study them patiently and with the reverence that their importance demands they will produce a very different impression. They are really very human documents, palpitating with life and breathing something of the passion and earnestness of the man who wrote them. They spring white-hot out of the experience of the man's own heart, and they witness to the vivid effect of His contact and communion with Jesus Christ. He writes of that which he knows, of that which had moved his nature to its very depths

and made him a new man. Behind all his theology there lay an experience which had changed the whole tenor of his life and from the effects of which he never escaped. It is this which renders the man and his work a subject of perennial interest in spite of the somewhat forbidding appearance of his style and language.

St. Paul was a typical Greek-speaking Jew of his time. He had been brought up in the straitest sect of his religion, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He had sat at the feet of the great masters of his religion and was probably destined himself to be a teacher in Israel. He was learned in subtle disputations and had a thoroughly Rabbinic mind. His interest in his religion on its legal and ethical side was very genuine, and he outdid his contemporaries in his efforts to live up to its strictest requirements. When Christianity first raised its head he became one of its most strenuous opponents, thinking that by so doing he was best serving his nation and his God. It was while engaged on this task that a great change came over him. The story of his conversion on the road to Damascus is one of the landmarks of history, and is best read in the light of all that followed from it. Probably a modern psychologist would describe it in very different terms from those used by the apostle himself, but he would only be speaking in his own language the same truths that Paul has described for us in his. The essence of it

all lies in the fact that he had a vision of Jesus Christ, as Augustine and Bunyan had in a later day, and that the vision revealed him to himself and started him on a fresh career. That it had been prepared for by something that he had seen and known of Christ and His followers previously there can be little doubt. He learnt how hard it was for him to kick against the goad, and he discovered in Jesus whom he persecuted both Lord and Christ. As he afterwards explained, too, there was a spiritual preparation for the *dénoument*. He had not been satisfied with his religion or with himself. He had come to realise the impossibility of meeting the claims of the law and of attaining to the righteousness of God. He knew himself to be a sinner, and he had sought vainly for a way of justification and escape. But in Jesus Christ he found that God had done for him what he could not do for himself. The death of Christ upon the cross became to him the sign and guarantee of a forgiveness deeper and greater than anything he could find in Judaism, and he cast himself upon the mercy so disclosed in an ecstasy of relief and gratitude. We must not imagine that all this was contained in the vision on the road to Damascus. That was but the spark that fired a train that had long been laid. But it meant for him an overwhelming experience of some great thing accomplished on his behalf. It set him in a new relation to God and the universe, and he spent the rest

of his days in working this out both in theory and practice.

The theology of St. Paul, therefore, as we find it in his letters is never separated from his experience of the grace of God in Christ. Only one of the letters, that to the Romans, is of the nature of a treatise, and even that contains most striking and pertinent applications of the ideas elaborated to the life and conduct of the new Christian communities. Most of the apostle's other writings were born out of controversy, and were written *ad hoc*, in an eager unpremeditated fashion that makes them live and speak still. The burden of them all is Jesus Christ and Him crucified, the source of the apostle's new-found life and peace, and the guarantee of the same to the Christian Church.

The position which St. Paul gives to Jesus Christ is all the more remarkable because he remains the child of his time and people, and expresses himself in the thought-forms familiar to them. He uses the current Messianic terms of later Judaism and applies them to Jesus Christ without any suggestion of incongruity. He is the Son of God, the Lord, the Image of God, the first-born of all Creation, Mediator, Advocate, and Intercessor between God and man, and God is to the apostle " the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It was this Jesus whom men had crucified ; and His death, which to the contemporaries of St. Paul was merely an ordinary execution, he translates

into an epoch-making event marking a new departure in the spiritual development of mankind. Here again the key to his thought is to be found in the fact that he was a Jew steeped in ideas of sacrifice and propitiation. In the death of Jesus he saw the whole system transfigured. He had become the victim of the old order, but in dying He had conquered and superseded it. He is now the inaugurator of a new and higher system in which He is both Priest and Sacrifice. In two great passages—Romans, viii. and Romans, iii.—St. Paul describes the death of Jesus as a sacrifice due to sin and as " a propitiation through faith in His blood." But both His coming and His death were due to the love of God for men, who while they were yet sinners sent His Son to die for them. The language which the apostle uses is that of his age and his religion, but it expresses what had been to himself a living and effective experience, and therefore in its terms men can still express their deliverance from the power of evil. For the religion of St. Paul was, first and last, a religion of the Spirit, and stood opposed, therefore, to all faiths based on legalism. The death of Christ became to him the guarantee of the freedom of God's grace. He was concerned always to answer the fundamental question, What must I do to be saved ? It is not enough that a man should be descended from Abraham and should keep the Law. He needs to be set right with God. But

it is impossible to be so set right (justified) by any righteousness of his own. God has sent His Son into the world in order that those who believe in Him, *i.e.*, those who are convinced that He was the Christ, the Son of God, that He died for their sins and was raised for their justification, may have this faith reckoned to them as righteousness. It is thus faith that justifies, and in virtue of it, men have their salvation as a free gift of God. Again the argument, and the illustrations by which it is enforced, are Rabbinic in form, but the truth enshrined in them is so true and so great that it lives and is fruitful still. At the core of it is a conception of God's grace, or active good-will, which appeals irresistibly to all those who have a real consciousness of their sin and need and has been verified in the experience of multitudes. To St. Paul Jesus Christ was at once the sign and pledge of this Divine grace. In Him men became partakers of it, and through Him it wrought for their salvation. Having discovered this for himself, and having realised the peace and power wrought by the discovery in his own life, he could not rest until he had imparted it to others. This constituted the gospel which he had made peculiarly his own and of which he was not ashamed.

The new life which men attain as the result of their redemption through grace the apostle describes in the most eager and glowing terms. It is a life of the Spirit, and manifests itself in

fellowship, service, and a lofty ethical ideal. He tells his fellow Christians: "You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells within you. On the other hand, if Christ is within you, though the body is a dead thing owing to Adam's sin, the Spirit is living as the result of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within you, then He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also make your mortal bodies live by His indwelling Spirit in your lives."[1] This new life of faith in God through the risen Christ manifests itself in an active propaganda of which the whole world is the object, and in a new ethical standard for those who are "in Christ." It brings to an end the religion of Nature and of law, and replaces them by the religion of the new heart and the new Sonship to God—a religion which shows itself in purity, righteousness, and peace—and paves the way for ultimate blessedness and victory over evil. It is a religion which centres round communion with God in Christ on the one hand and a new human fellowship on the other. In it God speaks directly to His children as He spoke of old times to the fathers, but He speaks now through His Son and to those who are in living fellowship with Him. Thus it is both sacramental and spiritual, and St. Paul seems content to leave these two aspects of it side by side without any definite

[1] Romans, viii. 9 (Moffatt's trans.).

attempt to co-ordinate them: "At one time it is faith that produces the Spirit, at another baptism, now union with Christ is through faith, and now again it is through the Lord's Supper. These two series of conceptions have not as yet been united under any one system." "Paul himself did not feel the problem at all which arose through the collision of the natural religion of redemption contained in the mysteries with an ethical faith like the Christian."[1] It is necessary to keep these facts in mind in order to understand the existence of apparently irreconcilable elements in St. Paul's theology, and also the varied developments in the Christian Church which claim to be based upon his teaching. We have to accept the fact that he was not an exact and systematic theologian, but an eager and passionate soul, bringing tribute to Christ from all the rich stores of his experience both inherited and acquired. His new knowledge of God was too rich, deep, and fruitful to be satisfied with any one form of expression.

St. Paul is often spoken of as the virtual founder of the Christian Church, but his work in this direction was largely unconscious. To him the ecclesia is the sum of all those who profess and call themselves Christians. It is the body of Christ in the sense that He is its Head and His people are in organic connection with Him. Wherever he went and preached he gathered his

[1] Weinel's "St. Paul," pp. 120, 121.

converts into Churches because he recognised the need for fellowship as a means of maintaining and extending the new life. But he laid down no strict organisation, being more concerned about the life than about the forms of its expression. One reason for this was the general expectation of the Parousia, which seemed to render any elaborate organisation unnecessary. But another and perhaps more powerful reason is to be found in the working of the Holy Spirit in the first Christian communities. He gave to the disciples gifts (*charismata*) which distinguished them from other men, and in the exercise of which they discovered their place in the new order, and which regulated their function and authority in the Church. Hence the possibility of such an exhortation as this: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in a spirit of meekness."[1] So long as the early enthusiasm and faith in the Holy Ghost lasted, so long this simple and family character of the fellowship remained possible. But as the glow of the dawn faded into the light of common day, other measures and more elaborate machinery became necessary. In the end of his days St. Paul recognised this and prepared the way for it, without in any way diminishing his zeal for the freedom of the Spirit or his belief in the saving power of grace alone.

His presentation of Christianity, then, while

[1] Gal. vi. 1.

it is his own and bears at every point the marks of his special experience, is yet but the logical expansion of the work and testimony of the Gospels. To St. Paul Christ is all and in all: God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and he is what he is by the grace of God in Christ. His preaching was what it is now the fashion to call Christo-centric, because to him Jesus Christ was the source and ground of salvation, and the author of a new and more blessed life.

The Witness of the Johannine Writings

Side by side with the Synoptic Gospels and the epistles of St. Paul we have in the New Testament another group of writings under the name of the Apostle John. These give a somewhat different presentation to the work and Person of Jesus Christ, and add greatly to the variety and richness of the story. They are marked by certain peculiarities both of thought and phraseology. As we have already seen, the fourth gospel presents a philosophy or theology rather than an historical narrative, though there is a real historical background behind it. It gives us a reinterpretation of the synoptic tradition in the light of the later Christian consciousness and experience. It is coloured throughout by Jewish Alexandrian thought, largely as it appears in

Philo, with whose work the writer would seem to have been familiar. Its dominant aim is to show the significance for the thought and life of the Church of Jesus as the Word, or Logos, of God. It is written that men may believe in Him as such. It is this apologetic aim which justifies a certain idealising and allegorising process in the portraiture of Jesus in this gospel. His human life tends to become an episode in the eternal life of the Word, and the figure presented is less simple and homely, more wonderful and awe-inspiring, than that of the Synoptic Gospels. A good deal of stress is laid on the miracles, but they are recorded largely for the sake of the lessons to be drawn from them, and seem to have an apologetic rather than an evidential value (*cf.* the cases of the healing of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus). In consonance with this there is a markedly figurative presentation of the Person of Jesus which serves to throw much fresh light on His relations with men. He is not only the Word of God, but the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, and so on. These titles are, no doubt, reflections of Christian experience, and the ideas they represent serve to interpret the more primitive evangelic narrative. The gospel as a whole should be regarded in this light rather than as a mere variant of, or antithesis to, the synoptic tradition. Generally speaking,

the gospel, like those of Matthew and Luke, is founded on the work of Mark, though it contains clear divergences from it. On these Dr. Moffatt says[1]: "Their motive cannot always be explained from his pragmatism, but the important point is that his method and its results do not suggest invariably the instinct of an eye-witness who sifts earlier traditions of differing value. The details are in the main the circumstantial minutiæ of a vivid or symbolic (Philonic) imagination, when they are not borrowed from the synoptic narratives. The use made of these narratives by the Fourth Evangelist really illustrates the derivative and secondary character of his work, judged from the historical standpoint, and this conclusion is not affected by the admission that on two points in particular, *e.g.*, the date of the death and the previous connection with Judæa, the tradition of the fourth gospel has substantially reproduced elements which later phases of the synoptic tradition tended to obliterate." The reflective process of which this gospel is the record is seen very plainly in its presentation of the relations of Jesus with His Father. The underlying element here is that unique consciousness of and faith in God which is implicit in many of the sayings recorded in the synoptics. In the fourth gospel, however, this unity of spirit becomes

[1] "Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament," p. 546.

explicit, and is made the foundation of metaphysical reflections on the Sonship and mission of Jesus which represent, not His own words, but the thought of the writer. On the same showing the gospel contains a theology of the death and resurrection, which is based on the facts as recorded, but goes far beyond the simple and incidental treatment of the earlier evangelists. Words like "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again,"[1] are dictated by the keen sense which the writer had for the Divine dignity of his Master, which made the voluntary nature of His sacrifice indispensable to His glory. At the same time, however, he does not allow these interpretations to obscure altogether the human side of the life and sufferings of Jesus: "The Fourth Evangelist not only accepts from tradition accounts of the deeds of his Master, but he naturally also accepts some of the phrases in regard to Him current in the Society. He accepts and indicates his Master's claim to the title Christ or Messiah. This he seems to do especially in opposition to the Jews. He brings forward the current objections of the Jews to the Messiahship of Jesus, such as His plebeian origin and His Galilean birthplace, His neglect of the Sabbath and the like, and furnishes

[1] St. John x. 18.

replies. It is, however, noteworthy that the evangelist does not counter the Galilean objection by the assertion that Jesus was really born in Bethlehem. This controversial element, however, is only subordinate, a sort of by-play in the gospel. One feels that the question of the Messiahship has with time become less acute. The title Son of Man so frequently applied to Himself by Jesus in the earliest tradition does occur in the fourth gospel, but not with any striking novelty of meaning. On the other hand, the term Son of God which Jesus does not directly apply to Himself in the Synoptic Gospels plays a far greater part in the fourth gospel, as is indeed natural." [1]

The general scheme and purpose of the gospel are also shown in the way in which small incidents in the life of Jesus are used as occasions for making pronouncements regarding His work or person. We see this in the conversations with Nicodemus and the woman at the well, in controversy with the Jews, and in the last discourses. These cannot be regarded as in any sense reports of actual words of Jesus. They are too sustained and elaborate for anything of the kind to be possible, and they have, too, evidently an apologetic purpose. Again, we must conclude that they represent the consciousness of certain ele-

[1] " The Ephesian Gospel," by Professor P. Gardner, p. 307.

ments in the early Church. That there is a special tradition behind them we may well believe, and we can even trace sometimes indications of the words of Jesus Himself. But the general form and substance of the teaching belongs to the evangelist, and serves to throw into clearer light the aspects of his Master which he was most anxious to set forth. The general impression is that of one who was " most human and yet most Divine," one like unto ourselves, and yet one in whom the Word of God was made flesh for us men and our salvation.

The gospel provides a further link between the life of Jesus and the history of the Church in its teaching about the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete or Comforter. Here again we see very clearly the process of later reflection on the words of Jesus. The whole gospel has been well described as spiritual, and its aim that of transferring, as it were, the life and teaching of Jesus from the historical to the spiritual plane. The writer has a keen sense of the reality of spiritual things. God Himself is Spirit, and in man Spirit and flesh are sharply contrasted. But to the Church after the resurrection the Spirit comes in a new and more effective fashion. He takes the place which Jesus had occupied during His lifetime, leading the disciples into the truth, and helping them in their witness to the things of Christ. In the fourth gospel the sending of the Spirit is a frequent

theme with Jesus in His last hours on earth, and in ch. xxi. 22 we read of the risen Lord: "He breathed on them (the disciples) and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit." This is a clear anticipation of the story of Pentecost, and cannot be reconciled with it. In the fourth gospel also the work of the Spirit is described in other terms than those used in the Lukan and Pauline writings. It is not so much the bestowal of gifts (*charismata*) which characterises Him, as the impartation of truth, and of the means of communion between man and God. He stands for the spiritual indwelling Christ rather than for any outward practical endowments. It is His function to impart to men truth and life, and to perfect in their experience the revelation of God through Christ.

The general doctrine of the fourth gospel is expanded in the Johannine epistles and brought into more direct relation with the life of the Christian Church. It is the business of Christians to love one another, for God is love, and only through love can men and women live in communion with Him. Love, too, is the fulfilling of the Law, the open door into the new life and the unseen world. Though the second and third epistles are probably not by the same author as the gospel and first epistle, they may be said to belong to the same school, and do not show any material difference in doctrine.

The Apocalypse

The book of Revelation provides a witness of its own to Jesus Christ, and one of the most varied and interesting kind. It represents a markedly Jewish form of Christianity, and exalts Jesus as the true Messiah. But at the same time He is set forth as an object of worship for Christians rather than the Roman emperor, to whom they were being called to give Divine honours. The book deals mainly with the heavenly life of the exalted Lord, and ascribes to Him honours and powers which set Him on a level with the Father Himself. He is "the first and the last and the Living One," "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah," "the Bright and Morning Star," "the Root and Offspring of David." He is the Son of God who gave His life for men, and as such is deserving of universal adoration. He is held up before the eyes of a persecuted and afflicted Church as One who is destined to bring the whole earth under His sway and trample His enemies beneath His feet. All this the writer sets forth by means of a strange and fantastic symbolism in which Jewish apocalyptic visions and Christian conceptions like that of the eternal Word are curiously intermingled. These make the book very difficult to interpret, but they cannot obscure the abiding impression made by Christ on His early followers, or their consciousness of the wonder and glory of

the new life and power derived from Him. The book gives evidence of a living and victorious faith of which men had already made proof. The letters to the seven Churches with which it opens are among the best evidence which the New Testament contains of the attitude of these early communities to their Lord and Master. They look to Him with a passion of devotion and a moral reverence that indicate a most exalted conception of His Person and work.

The Witness of Hebrews

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have a presentation of Jesus Christ which stands by itself. Though it has affinities with the teaching of St. Paul and with the Judaism of Alexandria, it strikes out a line of its own. The aim of the epistle is to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus, the Son of God, to all other messengers of His Will. He is higher than angels or prophets. He is the mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises and sealed with a blood " that speaketh better things than that of Abel." He is the great High Priest, who has offered the final and perfect sacrifice for sin, and has passed into the heavens as the Forerunner of the faithful, of whom He is the Head. As the Son of God He is " the effulgence of His glory and the very impress of His substance," and He upholds all things by

the word of His power. These lofty prerogatives, however, are not suffered to veil the fact that He lived a human life, suffered and was tempted like as we are. The whole aim of the writer is to show that the Jesus of history is the Christ of faith. His work throughout is apologetic, to prove to Jews and to Jewish Christians the superiority of the new covenant, or dispensation, over the old, a superiority which has its ground and reason in the perfect life and victorious sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who " when He had made purification for sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high."

CHAPTER VII

THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

No books have ever been subjected to so close and searching a scrutiny as have the books of the New Testament during the last hundred years; and the process has not been without good results. A certain measure of agreement has been arrived at among scholars, and it is now possible to speak of the origin, date, authorship, and authenticity of these documents with some approach to certainty. Our task now must be to give in as brief outline as possible the results so far attained.

The Synoptic Gospels

Every reader of the New Testament is aware of the differences and resemblances presented by the narratives of the first three gospels. These constitute what is called the Synoptic Problem, because the gospels are so related as to be capable of a common synopsis. It is now generally acknowledged, after more than a century of careful investigation, that the Gospel of Mark is

the earliest of the three, that it was used as a source by the writers of the other two gospels, and that when they so used it it was in very much the same condition as we now have it, both as regards text and contents. In addition to this common matter derived from Mark, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain a considerable amount of material not so derived. Of this some is peculiar to Matthew and some to Luke, but there is also other material given in both, and evidently again derived from a common source. This was originally written in Greek and contained sayings of Jesus about John the Baptist, with a number of miracle stories and of ethical teachings, including the Beatitudes, and ending with the parable of the houses built upon the rock and sand. This source, which is of course now lost, is generally called Q. (from the German " Quelle," source). Professor Burkitt says of it[1]: " In any case the material comprehended under the sign Q. includes very many of the most precious jewels of the gospel. When Justin Martyr in the second century wished to exhibit to the heathen emperor the characteristic ethical teaching of Christ, nine-tenths of his examples came out of passages derived from Q.[2] It is from Q. that we have the blessing on the poor, the hungry, the reviled: from Q. come ' Love your enemies,' ' Turn the

[1] " The Earliest Sources of the Life of Jesus," p. 44.
[2] Justin Martyr, " Apology," I., 15 *f.*

other cheek,' 'Be like your Father, who makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good,' 'Consider the lilies,' 'Be not anxious—your Father knoweth you have need,' 'They shall come from east and west and sit down with Abraham in the Kingdom of God.' It is Q. that tells us that the adversaries of Jesus found Him not ascetic enough, and mocked at Him as a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners. It is Q. that tells us that Jesus said 'I thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and revealed them to babes—even so, Father, for so it was pleasing in Thy sight.' If the work of Mark be more important to the historian, it is Q. that supplies starting-points for the Christian moralist. Most important of all, it gives light and shade to the somewhat austere lines of the portrait of Jesus sketched in the Gospel of Mark."

St. Mark's gospel represents the earliest attempt to tell the story of Jesus the Son of God. There is no need to question the ancient tradition that it was written at Rome by John Mark, the companion of Peter and Paul, and that its substance was derived from the preaching of the former apostle. It was probably compiled about the year 75 A.D. To a certain extent it represents also the Pauline view of Christianity, and sets forth the gospel about Jesus Christ rather than the teaching of Jesus Himself. It is a vivid and

graphic presentation of Jesus Christ as the great object of the Christian's faith and hope. In our copies of the gospel the story of the resurrection does not occur, the last twelve verses having been added later to supply the omission. The best explanation of this is probably to be found in the theory that the gospel was originally in two parts, like the two treatises of St. Luke, and that the second part began with the resurrection story and has been lost.[1] The Gospel of Matthew seems to be based, in the first instance, on a collection of the " Words of Jesus " in Aramaic made in Jerusalem about 45—50 A.D. by the disciple Matthew. As we have it, however, the gospel is a composite document written in Greek and made up from Mark's gospel, a Greek translation of the " Words " and other evangelic material. Its date is about A.D. 90, and it was written mainly for Jewish Christian writers. Of all the gospels it

[1] The following account of St. Mark's gospel is given by Papias on the authority of John the Presbyter : " And the elder said this also ; Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without, however, recording in order what was either said or done by Christ. For neither did he hear the Lord nor did he follow Him : but afterwards, as I said (attended) Peter, who adapted his instructions to the needs (of his hearers), but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord's oracles. So then Mark made no mistake, while he thus wrote down some things as he remembered them : for he made it his one care not to omit anything that he had heard, or to set down any false statement therein."

was the most influential in the early Church, and it had the double object of persuading men that Jesus is the Son of God, and of " teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded."

It is now generally agreed that the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are by one and the same hand. The identity of the author has been hotly disputed, but the balance of the argument seems to be in favour of Luke the physician. He may be regarded as the historian among the evangelists. He claims knowledge of many others who have written about Jesus Christ and for himself that he sets forth in order the things that Jesus began to do and teach,[1] and in which Christians were commonly instructed. The Gospel according to Luke has been called, not without reason, the most beautiful book in the world. It has more literary pretensions than either Mark or Matthew, and is written with wonderful insight and sympathy. In addition to Mark and Q. the writer had before him other sources peculiar to himself, parts of which are to be found in the Birth Narratives and in chs. ix.—xix. and xxiv. The frequent Hebraisms would suggest that some of the material was in Aramaic. The Gospel, along with the Acts, was composed before the year 100 A.D., and there is good reason to think that both books were written in Antioch.

[1] *Cf.* St. Luke i. 1—4 ; Acts i. 1—5.

The Acts of the Apostles shows a real acquaintance with the development of the early Church. It is based on first-hand knowledge of places, persons, and peoples, and bears out the author's desire to write carefully and in order. There are not a few difficulties and discrepancies which are by no means easy to explain. For the discussion of them the reader must be referred to the various commentaries. They do not seriously affect the conclusion that the Acts were written by Luke the physician, the companion of St. Paul, and that, judged by the standards of the time, they have a real historical value.

The Writings of St. Paul

The Letters of St. Paul form a group by themselves in the New Testament. They are not in any sense theological treatises, but genuine letters written to different Churches or individuals, and dealing with matters of immediate interest. In all of them the affections of the apostle are directly concerned. He writes from the heart, and his words have a warm human interest of their own. He is intimately concerned with the conduct and spiritual welfare of his correspondents, and he writes to them out of his own experience. It is necessary, therefore, to read what he has written in the light of our knowledge of his life and of the history of the Churches with which he was con-

cerned. There must also be sympathy with the apostle's standpoint, and an understanding of the importance of the eternal issues involved on the part of any who would interpret his words.

Of the letters nine are addressed to Churches and four to individuals. The greater number of them belong to the time of the apostle's missionary activity, the others to the time of his imprisonment in later life. The two earliest are the letters to Thessalonica, which were written from Corinth about the year 53. There has been some doubt about the genuineness of the second letter, and its doctrine of Antichrist suggests that it may contain material added later, but in any case before 70. The teaching of the letters corresponds generally with the apostle's preaching as described in Acts xiii. 16, xiv. and xvii. Of the Corinthian letters the first was written from Ephesus during the third missionary journey in the year 57. It was called forth, partly by certain abuses which had crept into the Corinthian Church, and partly by a letter from Corinth asking for advice on certain points. A previous letter from Paul had dealt with a case of immorality which had arisen in the Christian circle at Corinth. This letter is now lost, though part of it is thought to have been preserved in 2 Cor. vi. 14—vii. 1. The first extant letter deals with the same subject as well as with the faction in the Church, the ques-

tion of liberty as to meats offered to idols, the observance of the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts. It closes with a doctrinal section on the resurrection, probably in answer to Greek objectors, and with certain practical injunctions. The second letter is less of an ordered whole, but is composed of undoubtedly Pauline material. It represents a letter sent to the Corinthian Church from Macedonia somewhat later than the first one, but it probably did not take the form in which we possess it till much later.

Romans was probably written earlier during the winter of 55—56 which Paul passed at Corinth. It is a very tactful appeal to a Church which might not be altogether favourable to Paul's presentation of the gospel. It contains a rapid sketch of the place of the gospel in God's providential order, and sets forth the relations of Jew and Gentile in the scheme of redemption, and ends with a number of practical exhortations.

About the date of the Epistle to the Galatians there has been much controversy, but, on the whole, the evidence seems to point to its having been written about the same time as Romans and Corinthians. It was addressed to a group of Churches in Galatia, and has as its main theme the adoption of men to Sonship through the Spirit, in reply to the contention of certain Judaisers that Sonship is only through the Law. It

is a great plea for true liberty in Christ as over against the bondage of the law.

Towards the end of his career Paul spent two years in prison at Cæsarea, and after the memorable journey to Rome in the winter 59—60 was confined there more or less closely for two years more. It was during this time that the letters of the imprisonment were written. Of the controversy regarding them Professor B. W. Bacon writes: "Recent research into religious conditions in the early Empire has removed the principal objections to the authenticity of Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, and even Ephesians. We are far from being compelled to come down to the time of the great Gnostic systems of the second century to find a historical situation appropriate to this group of letters purporting to be written by Paul from his captivity. Indeed, they exhibit on any theory of their origin a characteristic and legitimate development of the Pauline gospel of Sonship by the spirit of adoption abolishing the dispensation of law. It is a development almost inevitable in a conception of the gospel formed on Greek ideas of Redemption, if we place in opposition to it a certain baser type of superstitious, mongrel Judaism, revealed in the epistles themselves, repeatedly referred to in Acts, and now known to us by a mass of extraneous documentary material." [1]

[1] "The Making of the New Testament," p. 85.

The so-called Pastoral Epistles 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are still regarded by many scholars as in no sense genuinely Pauline. It is urged that they are not the kind of letters Paul would have written to his companions, as these would hardly need to receive evidences of his apostleship or to be warned against heresy. These letters, too, more ecclesiastical than spiritual, more moral than evangelical, are said to be both in tone and style very unlike the other writings of the apostle, nor is it easy to find a place for them in St. Paul's life as we know it. Such arguments, however, are not very conclusive, and it may be pointed out, on the other hand, that these letters, especially the second to Timothy, do contain certain passages which have a genuinely Pauline sound. There are many allusions in them of a kind too intimate and personal to have been invented. The probability is therefore that they contain a considerable amount of genuinely Pauline material that has been worked up into its present form by some follower of the apostle in the early years of the second century.

The Epistles of St. Peter

The epistles under the name of Peter belong to a large class of writings (epistles, gospel, acts, and apocalypse) attached to the name of this apostle, of which only two were finally adopted into the

canon. They deal quite openly with false doctrine of a kind that at least anticipates the Gnosticism of the second century, and to counteract it they hark back to "the faith once for all delivered to the saints," "the pattern of sound doctrine," etc., which is in danger of being superseded. The First Epistle of Peter has about it nothing that seems to suggest the Fisherman of the Gospels. It is a finished literary production with considerable Pauline affinities. It has been attributed to Barnabas and Silvanus, but more probably it was originally an anonymous letter written from Rome about 85 A.D. to encourage the churches of Asia Minor under persecution. The use of the name of the apostle in order to give it added authority would not be regarded as illegitimate.

The Second Epistle of Peter is so closely related to the Epistle of Jude that it is obvious that the one has borrowed from the other. The balance of opinion now inclines to the belief that Jude is the original, and there does not seem to be any very decisive reason for rejecting the early tradition that it was written by Jude, the brother of our Lord. Both epistles are late, and 2 Peter is evidently a compilation of the same class as the apocalypse of Peter, originating in Egypt and reflecting the thought of the Church in the second century.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews is an apologetic letter, and one of the most interesting and powerful in the New Testament. It is obviously addressed to Jewish Christians who were in danger of going back to Judaism, and seeks to demonstrate for their benefit the superiority of Christianity to the old dispensation. In all probability these people formed a section of the Church in Rome. The letter has been widely attributed to St. Paul, but the internal evidence is decisively against his authorship. Neither the style nor the argument are his. Failing Paul it has been variously assigned to Barnabas, to Apollos, to Aquila and Priscilla, and to Philip, and ingenious reasons may be adduced in favour of the authorship of any of these, but in no case are they really conclusive. The letter remains another indication of the wealth of inspired (and anonymous) material in the early Church. The most probable date for the letter would appear to be about the beginning of the Neronian persecutions.

The Epistle of James

If this book is the work of James of Jerusalem, our Lord's brother, then it must have been written late in his life, and was probably addressed to Jews. This would explain the

small Christian element in it and the argument against the obvious abuse of Paul's doctrine of faith. Many scholars, however, think that it is post-apostolic and belongs to the early part of the second century. In any case, it is thought to contain many sayings of Jesus not published elsewhere, and may be regarded as a brief compendium of Christian ethics, written for a special audience and a special purpose.

The Johannine Writings

We turn now to the Johannine writings, the Fourth Gospel, the Epistles of John, and the Book of Revelation. With these we enter on an entirely new phase of New Testament thought. The gospel and the first epistle are undoubtedly by the same hand, and may be considered together first. The epistle is an epilogue to the gospel, and presses home its teaching in its more practical aspects. The wide divergence between this gospel and the synoptic writers in style, narrative, intention, and atmosphere is familiar to every reader of the New Testament, and constitutes the most difficult problem of New Testament interpretation. To find its solution we must recognise, in the first place, that the gospel is not and does not pretend to be history, but is a theological or apologetic treatise written in order that men may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and

that, believing, they may have life in His name. It was written at Ephesus in the early years of the second century. It deals with a situation which had been created by the Pauline presentation of the gospel. It sets forth Jesus Christ to the faith and devotion of believers as the incarnate Word of God, and yet as a true man in the thought and language then current and in such fashion as to counteract both Gnostic and Docetic heresy. That a book of this kind could have been the work of John the son of Zebedee is quite out of the question. At the same time it certainly represents the gospel *according to John, i.e.,* a setting and interpretation of the evangelic record from another point of view than that of the Petrine tradition--the point of view, *i.e.,* of one who is described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." It is a "spiritual" gospel as over against those which are merely or mainly historical. It knows and uses the synoptic narratives, but departs from them deliberately in order to further the aims of the writer. Who this writer was it is impossible to say. We shall not be far wrong, however, if we assume that he was a disciple of the son of Zebedee as well as a follower of Paul, and that he derived his material from the teaching of the former, and his form from the ideas current in Pauline circles in Ephesus.

The Johannine epistles belong to the same circle of writings as the gospel, and are probably

by the same hand. The first of them, as we have seen, served as a kind of appendix to the gospel, and is a general treatise addressed to the Church at large, setting forth the main points of the Johannine gospel with special stress on its practical application. The second letter is addressed to an individual Church under the title of the elect lady and her children. This was undoubtedly one of the Churches of Asia, the Church of Diotrephes and Gaius, sometimes identified with that of Pergamum. The chief aim of the letter is to combat the Docetic heresy, the deceivers " who confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh." The Church is warned that the only safeguard against this " Antichrist " is to abide in the apostle's teaching.

Third John is a private letter addressed to one Gaius, who is made the writer's correspondent in the Church because Diotrephes the bishop will have nothing to do with him. He thanks Gaius for his hospitality to certain preachers, exhorts him to continue in good works, and commends to him his friend Demetrius, probably the bearer of this letter. The whole tone of the writer shows that he is one who has some title to speak with authority. In this epistle, as well as in 2 John, the writer styles himself the Elder. This has led some authorities to identify him with John the Presbyter and to distinguish between him and the writer of the fourth gospel and the

first epistle. If it were possible to show that the author of these latter was John the son of Zebedee there might be something in the distinction. As it is, however, the title Elder might equally well apply to the author of all four books.

The book of Revelation presents a different problem from the rest of the Johannine literature. It is frankly apocalyptic, and the only parallels to it in the New Testament are to be found in 2 Thessalonians and in the eschatological passages in the Synoptic Gospels (St. Mark xiii., St. Matt. xxiv., and St. Luke xxi.). In later Judaism apocalyptic had come to take the place once filled by prophecy. Dr. Charles, the greatest modern authority on the subject, argues that we have in apocalyptic the indispensable link which unites the Old and New Testaments. He says[1]: "It follows that prophecy and apocalyptic are, in the main, concerned with the same objects, that they use, in the main, the same methods, but that, whereas the scope of prophecy was limited, as regards time and place, that of apocalyptic was as wide as the universe and as unlimited as time. Moreover, inasmuch as prophecy had died long before the Christian era, and its place had been taken by apocalyptic, it was from the apocalyptic side of Judaism that Christianity was born—and in that region of Palestine where apocalyptic and not legalism held

[1] "Between the Old and New Testaments," p. 32.

its seat—even in Galilee, from whence, as we know, came our Lord and eleven of His disciples." A special interest, therefore, attaches to the one purely apocalyptic book of the New Testament. Hitherto it has met with scant justice at the hands of Bible students, having been regarded as a kind of puzzle of which all manner of fantastic solutions were offered. But a truly critical and historical study of it bears very different fruit. The external evidence for the date and authorship of the book is both clear and abundant. Early in the second century it was widely accepted in Asia as representing the teaching and authority of the Apostle John, and there is no reason to question the belief that, in its present form, it first appeared in Ephesus about the year 95. At the same time the book is very far from being a unity. The opening chapters and the epilogue (Rev. i.—iii. and xxii. 6—21) are concerned with the churches of Asia, and are full of local colour and show a real historical background. The body of the book is occupied with a series of apocalyptic visions having their scene in Palestine and their subject the struggle of Jerusalem against Rome. But these again are not a unity. Some of the visions (*e.g.*, ch. xi.) seem to belong to a time before A.D. 70, others (*e.g.*, ch. xviii.) seem to take us as far down as the reign of Domitian (A.D. 95). There is little doubt, therefore, that the central portion of the book represents a collection of

Jewish Christian prophecies, and the framework a number of pastoral exhortations to the Asian churches. These no doubt proceeded from Johannine circles in Ephesus, to which also must be ascribed the editing of the whole book. Its great value for us consists in the fact that it mirrors for us in a quite extraordinary way the conditions of the Pauline Churches in Asia at the close of the first century, and the effect upon Jewish thought of the horrors of the Roman conquest and the bitterness engendered thereby. It also offers a striking example of the ease with which, under these conditions, apocalyptic prophecy became naturalised in the Christian Church.

Conclusion

From this brief and rapid survey of the growth and collection of the literature forming our New Testament certain conclusions may be drawn. It is no longer possible to doubt the genuinely historical character of the work. What we have here is not imagination or myth-making, but reflection upon facts, reflection coloured, no doubt, in every case, by the experience of the writer and by the conditions under which he wrote, but none the less resting upon an historical background. This is seen, in the first place, in St. Paul's letters, the authenticity of the great bulk of which is now beyond question. The evidence which they give

is largely unconscious, but all the more valuable on that account. They take for granted the main facts of the work and teaching of Jesus Christ, and they give to His Person a valuation which is quite extraordinary when we consider the comparatively short time which separates the writing of these letters from the close of His ministry on earth. At the same time they reproduce the atmosphere of the early Christian communities, and by their naïve discussion of conflicts, scandals, and difficulties show how closely they reflect the realities of the situation. The intimate revelation they give of the character, life, and personality of the writer is another guarantee of their good faith. The Synoptic Gospels, on the other hand, represent a later and a different development. They are not first-hand documents, and they contain the witness of the community rather than that of individuals. Again they are the more valuable on this account. We can, as we have seen, go behind them to a common source or tradition that has its roots in history. This is both oral and documentary, and, whether it concerns the teaching of Jesus or the events of His ministry, may be regarded as bringing us into direct touch with reality. In other words, what men came to think and teach concerning Jesus Christ was directly based on what they had seen and heard. Even the fourth gospel has behind it a definite historical back-

ground. Dr. E. A. Abbott, for example, says: "I find that the fourth gospel, in spite of its poetic character, is closer to history than I had supposed." In one of the most recent books[1] on the subject the position is well put as follows: "The narrative in the fourth gospel is historical in the sense that more than any other it conveys the impression of a person full, as it says, of grace and truth, full of a marvellous personal influence or effluence which not only changed men through and through, but became in them a fount of kindred life to others. . . . The result may not be history as a record or synopsis of the past, but it may be history as a revelation of the life, and one may take it that the fourth gospel is history in this wider sense." Of all the books of the New Testament it is true that they represent a very living religious experience on the part of the writers. In forming the Canon of Scripture the Church endorsed their work because this experience was widely shared and easily reproduced. When in modern times a man says of the Bible that it "finds" him, *i.e.*, quickens his spirit and awakens his sense of need, he is but reproducing this process. That the Bible remains capable of such treatment is one of the evidences for its religious truth and value.

[1] "The Renascence of Jesus," by Rev. J. R. Cameron.

CHAPTER VIII

REVELATION, INSPIRATION, AND THE CANON

It is a commonplace of theology that if there be a God He will make Himself known. To conceive of Him as living in splendid isolation apart from His universe and unconcerned with it is really to remove Him beyond our ken. If we are able to know Him at all it is due to the fact that by His very nature He is knowable, that He can speak to men, and that they can hear. The old-fashioned distinction between revealed and natural religion is one that can no longer be maintained. We know now that religion is natural to man, not an external acquirement, but part of his very being, its normal and legitimate expression. In all religion, therefore, we may assume that God is active as well as man. "He hath never left Himself without witness," and in even the dimmest gropings of the primitive mind after the Unseen there is a kind of response to the action and Word of God. The fact that religion so often finds its normal expression in the intimacies of man's social and domestic life is but a comment

on the Scriptural rule, " The Word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart."

In seeking, therefore, for evidences of revelation in the Bible we must not expect to find anything altogether abnormal and unlike what meets us in other religions. The difference between the religion of the Bible and all other forms of religion is not that in the one we have the true revealed religion, and in the other religions which are false because the product of the vain imaginations of men, but rather that there is in the Bible a much higher form of religion than is to be found elsewhere. The difference, in other words, is one of degree rather than of kind, and the extent and significance of it are to be judged by the fruits it bears, and by the part it has played in the development of the human race. Man's instinctive longing for God has been compared to the crying of children in the night. But it must not be forgotten that the cry has found an answer. In all religions is the belief that God speaks to men, and that He does not speak in vain. The progress of religion is conditioned by the same kind of factors that we find at work in the natural world. There is the spiritual organism in man's religious nature, and the spiritual environment in God who overshadows and encompasses him. These act and react upon each other, and the history of religion is the history of this process. Revelation in the sense of the self-communication of God is

as necessary and as real as the receptivity of man.

It must be remembered, however, that man's religious development has not followed a normal and uniform course. The appeal of religion is to the whole man, to his intellectual, moral, and emotional natures. But in different religions, and in the same religion at different times, a due proportion between these elements has not been preserved. There are religions in which the moral element is largely lacking; others in which the intellect or the emotions are paramount. Theologically interpreted, this means that religious progress has been hindered and perverted by error and sin. Men have loved darkness rather than light, and have even turned the light that was in them to darkness. This is not a denial of the fact of revelation, but it shows that in all religion the Divine and the human are inextricably mingled.

A common objection to any theory of revelation is that it assumes the existence and action of the supernatural. Rightly understood, however, such an assumption should present no real difficulty. Man himself is a supernatural being, in the sense that he is not simply part of the natural world and cannot be explained or accounted for on purely naturalistic grounds. Our conception of the universe must be wide enough to include all that is involved in human personality and con-

sciousness, and cannot be confined to what we call natural phenomena. Rightly regarded, too, the universe will appear to us as a realm of ends, and must be judged in relation to the ends which it serves. These carry us far beyond the phenomenal world, and can only be expressed in terms of the spiritual. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that spirit which emerges at one point is active at all points, and has a part to play quite as important as that of matter in building up the whole.

Again, theologically interpreted, this leads to the conclusion that God's relation to the universe is one both of transcendence and immanence. The universe is " the garment we see God by." He manifests Himself in and through it. Men themselves can discern Him in virtue of His Spirit within them. But the universe does not exhaust God, nor is it His final and complete expression. He transcends it as man's mind transcends his body, and, in the last resort, the universe is but the instrument and expression of His Will.

Truths like these, for which the modern mind seeks justification in philosophy and science, are in the Bible taken for granted. Its doctrine of Revelation is comparatively simple. God manifested Himself unto the fathers " in divers portions and in divers manners," and the process culminated in a supreme manifestation through His Son. He made Himself known, as we have

seen, through sacred places, objects, and persons, through law and prophecy, and writings. Such communications were either direct or through the medium of His Spirit, Word, Wisdom, or Angel. That such intermediaries are necessary, and that God cannot be seen face to face, is an idea common to many religions, and in Israel marked the growing consciousness of God's holiness and separateness from men. So again on man's side communication with God was seldom direct, but came more readily through dream, vision, trance, or ecstasy. In all these we see man's more or less crude efforts to express his belief in the self-communication of God. The terms used and the meaning read into them are necessarily adapted to the condition of the individuals or peoples involved. If God speaks to men at all, it is natural that He should use language which they can understand, and so lead them on from lower to higher conceptions of His Word and Work. This simple canon accounts for all the most perplexing accompaniments of the Old Testament revelation, and makes it possible to believe that there is some Divine activity behind the strange and even repulsive manifestations of primitive religions. The one thing that we must not do is judge these by the standards of our own time and of our own degree of spiritual culture. The quality of revelation necessarily varies according to man's capacity to receive it, and

according to the standard of his religious development.

In the New Testament the conception of revelation is both broadened and deepened. Both in the teaching of Jesus and in St. Paul, man's natural affinity with God and consequent capacity to receive the Word of God are insisted upon. But the distinctive contribution of the New Testament on the subject is seen in the idea of the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ. In His Son God approaches nearer to men than He could do through His messengers or prophets of olden times. In Jesus Christ men come into direct and living contact and communion with God. His function is not merely to impart knowledge of God, but to mediate His Spirit and Life. He came, it is true, in the fulness of the times, and built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles of an earlier day. But He at once fulfilled and superseded all their efforts. This revelation also was conditioned by man's receptivity or lack of it. It was not received and understood at the first onset, as it were. Human experience had its part to play in the matter, and the various accounts given of the life and work of our Lord and the varied impressions He produced all bear witness to the fact. From that day to this Christian experience has had its part to play in the setting forth and verification of the Divine Word. Through the Person and Work and Teach-

ing of Jesus Christ men have found God, and the more fully they have submitted themselves to His guidance the deeper and richer has been their knowledge of Him. They find God through that which He does for them in Christ. The knowledge of this is mediated to them through the Scriptures, which are the record of God's dealings through His chosen channels. The truth and power to which they witness every man can verify for himself. As the Scriptures find him he can say Amen in his own experience to the message they deliver.

Inspiration

The method or process by which God's revelation is made known is generally termed Inspiration. The terms are sometimes confused, and revelation should, strictly speaking, be confined to the finished product, the Word or Will, or knowledge of God, and inspiration to the process or vehicle by which it comes. Granted man's capacity for receiving the Word of God, then inspiration describes the state of preparedness which makes him a fit channel for the Divine message. It is obvious that there will be degrees in inspiration, and the whole history of the process testifies to this fact. God hath never left Himself without witness, and has always found fit agents for making His witness known. But it is not all

of these agents who can be regarded as inspired in the strict sense of the term. There is a loose popular use of the word which should be carefully distinguished from its religious significance. For example, we may speak of poets, artists, etc., as being inspired. They possess the Divine afflatus, they have genius, they have a special faculty of making known to men the wonderful works of God. It is no disparagement to them, however, to say that in religious men we have an inspiration of a higher kind, differing from theirs in something more than degree. So, again, other religions than that of the Bible claim to have their inspired men, and even inspired scriptures. That men and women can be possessed by the Deity and so become channels of His Will and Word is an idea common to most forms of religion. In their more primitive state this possession is shown, or induced, by a condition of excitement or frenzy which passes for inspiration. The same phenomena are seen in the Old Testament in the cases of Saul and some of the earlier prophets, where the ecstatic condition can be produced by music. The descent of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles means a condition of religious exaltation, and similar phenomena are seen in religious revivals even in modern times. In the great religions of the world, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Islam, there are sacred writings which claim authority in virtue of their Divine

inspiration very much as the Bible does among Christians.

Various theories of Biblical inspiration have been held. First there is the theory of plenary or verbal inspiration, according to which the Biblical writers were simply automatic pens taking down, as it were, the very words of the Holy Spirit. This ensured the absolute inerrancy of every word of Scripture. This position, once widely held, has gradually broken down under the weight of evidence derived from the study of the Bible itself. Scripture nowhere makes any such claims on its own behalf. It does indeed claim the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, but not in any such way as to dispense with the human factor. In matters of science, history, etc., the Bible is not infallible, and even in moral and religious questions it admits of progress, and at no one point can be said to have reached finality. The recognition of this has led, therefore, to theories of inspiration which recognise degrees in the process and claim only a general superintendence for the Holy Spirit. These theories generally result in the claim that the theology and morality of the Bible are inspired and therefore infallible, but not its history, science, or philosophy. The distinction is not one that can be logically made, and the necessity for making it has led to giving the Church the sole prerogative of Scripture interpretation. It was their objection

to this doctrine which led the Reformers to frame a theory of inspiration based on the work of the Holy Spirit, and having for its object edification rather than instruction. They regarded the Bible as the supreme authority in matters of faith because it contains the Word of God. That Word is made known to men and becomes in them the means of a new life through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit is as necessary in the interpretation of the Bible as it was in its original composition. This provides a sufficient basis for any modern theory of inspiration. We cannot limit the work of the Spirit of God to the Biblical writers, but in view of the ends which it serves and the spiritual results which it achieves we are justified in finding in the Bible a far higher degree of inspiration than in any other literature, sacred or profane. Its various writings are not uniformly inspired, or of a uniform spiritual value. They represent a progressive revelation, and their inspiration consists in the moral and spiritual quickening of the writers, which is capable of being used for the same quickening of those who read. We look for this inspiration, therefore, not in any verbal accuracy, or in any power of imparting secular knowledge, but in the capacity of the Bible to unfold the will and ways of God and to bring us into living communion with Him. The whole process culminates in the revelation of Christ in

the New Testament and in the redemption which He wrought for the children of men. Scripture as a whole must be judged by the light of the revelation in Christ, and by its power to make men and women "wise unto salvation." Only those who submit themselves to the working of that Spirit of God, through whose operation the Bible came to be, can use it as it was intended to be used and can bring forth from it things new and old.

The Canon

In the foregoing chapters we have seen how the books of the Bible are nearly all the result of a process of collection and growth. They are part of a very considerable religious literature both Jewish and Christian, and we have yet to ask how it was that just these books came to be selected to form our Bible. In other words, we have to trace the process of the formation of the canon or rule of Scripture. The process was, again, a very gradual one. The first part of the Old Testament to receive definite recognition was the Pentateuch. This was after the completion of the Priestly Code in B.C. 444. No doubt the acceptance and recognition of a written Law of God as binding on the people was one of the means by which the national cohesion was secured after the exile. The second stage in the formation of the Old Testament Canon was the addition to the Law of the prophetic books

earlier and later. About two centuries later these came to be officially recognised as sacred Scriptures, though of inferior authority to the Law. Practically they had been recognised earlier, and the act of canonisation only gave the seal to what was already an accomplished fact. The third stage in the process completed the Old Testament by the addition of the Kethubim, Hagiographa, or sacred writings. This took place about a century before the Christian era, and had probably been furthered by the persecutions under Antiochus and the revolt of the Maccabees. But even then there were certain books, *e.g.*, Esther and Canticles, that remained, as it were, on the borderland, and were not generally accepted. It was a question whether these should be recognised or placed with the apocryphal books, and it was not until the Synod of Jamnia about A.D. 90 that the matter was finally settled and the line between Scripture and apocrypha finally drawn and the Canon closed. It is sometimes said that the makers of the Canon are really the inspired authors of Scripture. But this is altogether to misunderstand the situation. What the makers of the Canon did was simply to register an already existing state of things. The great majority of the Old Testament books gained canonical authority in virtue of their intrinsic religious value. They had gradually established themselves in the estimation of the pious in the

land, and the work of the scribes in forming them into a canon added nothing to their value, but simply gave a kind of official sanction to their status. The feeling of the Jews regarding these sacred books is described by Josephus in the early days of the Christian Church as follows : " Though so long a time has now passed no one has dared to add anything to them or alter anything. But all the Jews are instinctively led from the moment of their birth to regard them as decrees of God, and to abide by them and, if need be, gladly to die for them."

The formation of the New Testament Canon came about by processes very similar to that of the Old, save that the time occupied by it was much shorter. The only scriptures possessed by the early Church in the first years of its existence were those of the Old Testament. At their meetings, however, it was customary to hear spoken reminiscences of the Master, and the letters of the beloved Apostle Paul were read in some of the churches even during his lifetime. As the story of the life of Jesus came to be committed to writing, it would also be read, and Justin Martyr, writing about the year 140 A.D., tells us how the " Memoirs of the Apostles " were read in the weekly meetings of the Church. Twenty years later Tatian, a disciple of Justin, wrote his " Diatessaron," a combination of all four of our Gospels into a single Life of Jesus

Christ. This was regularly read in churches along with the Old Testament, and shows that by this time the Gospels at least were regarded as Scripture. About the year 170 the Muratorian fragment gives the first extant list of New Testament writings known to be in use in the Church. It contains the whole of the New Testament as we know it, except the Epistles of James, Hebrews, and i. and ii. Peter. It also mentions the Epistles to the Laodiceans and Alexandrians as forgeries and not to be received, and the revelation of Peter as being of doubtful authenticity. Many years later, in 331, Eusebius was directed by the Emperor Constantine to make copies of the New Testament Scriptures for use in the churches of Constantinople. Even then, however, he was not quite sure what should be included. He mentions as controverted books James, Jude, ii. and iii. John, and ii. Peter, and he is uncertain about the book of Revelation. He also mentions the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas as spurious books which deserve consideration. If, as some scholars think, our Sinaitic MS. of the New Testament is a copy of Eusebius's collection, then that collection contained all the books in our New Testament, with the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas in an appendix. Thirty years later, in 365, Athanasius gave a list of the New Testament Scriptures which contains all the books in our Bible. When the great Vulgate

Version, a translation of the Bible into Latin, was made by Jerome in 383 it also contained all the books in our New Testament, and by that time the question of the Canon may be said to be closed. This is but a brief summary of a long story, but it will suffice to show once more that the formation of the Canon was not due to the arbitrary action of any individuals. It was rather the outcome of the consciousness of the whole Church. Books came to be regarded as scripture because they appealed to the enlightened spiritual sense, and because they proved their value in maintaining and quickening the spiritual life. We may say, therefore, that the work of the Holy Spirit of God is seen not only in the composition of the Scriptures, but in their selection from a mass of similar material to be the authoritative Word of God to His Church. The process by which this was accomplished is a wonderful illustration of the working of His Providence.

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